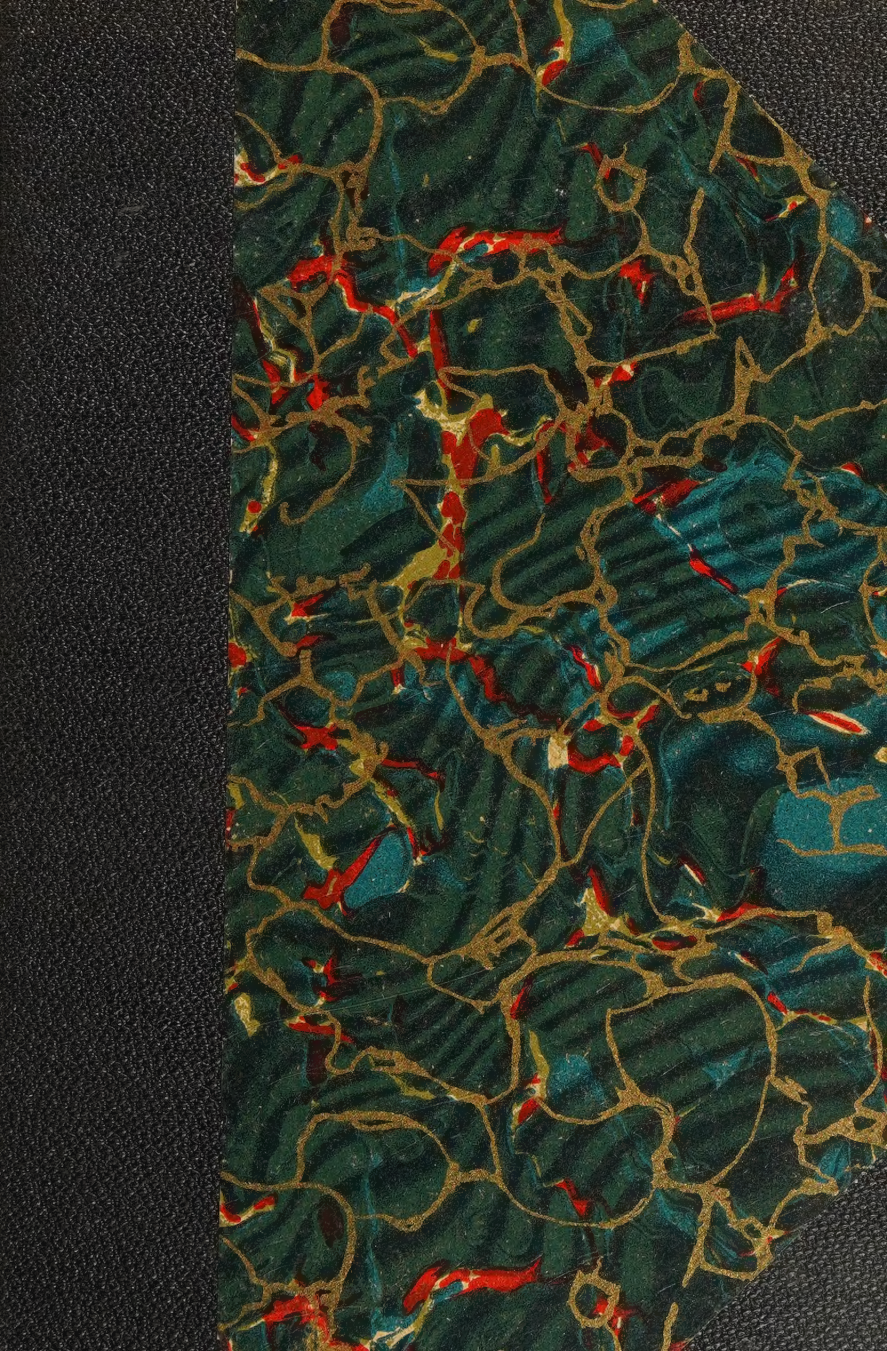

They grew bolder, and presently formed a circle round the dead girl.—*Little Louise Roque.*

Selected Stories

BY

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VOLUME III

The Sunday Outings of a Bourgeois, Little Louise Roque, Moiron, Monsieur Bombard's Little Game, The Bit of String, Magnetism, Boitelle, Who Knows? Etc.

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THE SUNDAY OUTINGS OF A BOURGEOIS

MONSIEUR PATISSOT, born in Paris, after failing in his examinations at the Collège Henri IV, like many others had entered the government service through the influence of one of his aunts, who kept a tobacco-store where the head of one of the departments bought his supplies.

He advanced very slowly, and perhaps would have died a fourth-class clerk without the aid of a kindly Providence, which sometimes watches over our destiny. To-day he is fifty-two years old, and at this age he is beginning to explore, as a tourist, all that part of France which lies between the fortifications and the provinces.

The story of his advance might be useful to many employés, just as the tale of his excursions may be of value to many Parisians who will take them as a model for their own outing, and will thus, through his example, avoid certain mishaps that occurred to him.

In 1854 he enjoyed a salary of only 1,800 francs. Through a peculiar trait of his character he was

unpopular with all his superiors, who let him languish in an eternal and hopeless expectation of the clerk's ideal, an increase of salary. Nevertheless, he worked; but he did not know how to make himself appreciated. He had too much self-respect, he said. His self-respect consisted in never bowing to his superiors in a low and servile manner, as did, according to him, certain of his colleagues, whom he would not mention. He added that his frankness embarrassed many persons, for, like all the rest, he protested against injustice and the favoritism shown to many that were entirely foreign to the bureaucracy. But his indignant voice never passed beyond the little cage where he worked.

First as a government clerk, then as a Frenchman, and finally as a man who believed in order, he would adhere to whatever government was established, having an unbounded reverence for authority, except that of his chiefs.

Each time that he had a chance he would place himself where he could see the Emperor pass, in order to have the honor of taking off his hat to him; and he would go away puffed up with pride at having bowed to the head of the state.

From his habit of observing the sovereign he did as many others do; he imitated the way he trimmed his beard or arranged his hair, the cut of his clothes, his walk, his mannerisms. Indeed, how many men in each country seemed to be the living images of the head of the government! Perhaps he vaguely

resembled Napoleon III, but his hair was black; therefore he dyed it, and then the likeness was complete; and when he met another gentleman in the street also imitating the imperial countenance he was jealous and looked at him disdainfully. This need of imitation soon became his hobby, and, having heard an usher at the Tuileries imitate the voice of the Emperor, he acquired the same intonations and studied slowness.

He thus became so much like his model that they might easily have been mistaken for each other, and certain high dignitaries were heard to remark that they found it unseemly and even vulgar; the matter was mentioned to the prime minister, who ordered that the employé should appear before him. But at the sight of him he began to laugh and repeated two or three times: "That's amusing, really amusing!" This was repeated, and the following day Patissot's immediate superior recommended that his subordinate receive an increase of salary of three hundred francs. He received it immediately.

Thereafter his promotions came regularly, thanks to his ape-like faculty of imitation. The presentiment that some high honor would come to him some day caused his chiefs to speak to him with deference.

When the Republic was proclaimed it was a disaster for him. He felt lost, done for, and, losing his head, he stopped dyeing his hair, shaved his face clean and had his hair cut short, thus acquiring a

paternal and benevolent expression that could not compromise him in any way.

Then his chiefs took revenge for the long time during which he had imposed upon them, and, having all turned Republican through an instinct of self-preservation, they cut down his salary and delayed his promotion. He, too, changed his opinions. But the Republic not being a palpable and living person whom one can resemble, and the presidents succeeding each other with rapidity, he found himself plunged in the greatest embarrassment, in terrible distress, and, after an unsuccessful imitation of his last ideal, Monsieur Thiers, he felt a check put on all his attempts at imitation. Needing a new manifestation of his personality, he searched for a long time; then, one morning, he arrived at the office wearing a new hat with a small red, white, and blue rosette. His colleagues were astounded; they laughed all that day, the next day, all the week, all the month. But the seriousness of his demeanor at last disconcerted them, and once more his superiors became anxious. What mystery could be hidden under this sign? Was it a simple manifestation of patriotism, or an affirmation of his allegiance to the Republic, or perhaps the badge of some powerful association? But to wear it so persistently he must surely have some powerful and hidden protection. It would be well to be on one's guard, especially as he received all pleasantries with unruffled calmness. After that he was treated with respect,

and his sham courage saved him; he was appointed head clerk on the first of January, 1880.

His whole life had been spent indoors. He hated noise and bustle, and because of this love of rest and quiet he had remained a bachelor. He spent his Sundays reading tales of adventure and ruling guide lines which he afterward offered to his colleagues. In his whole existence he had taken only three vacations of a week each, when he was changing his quarters. But sometimes, on a holiday, he would leave by an excursion train for Dieppe or Havre, in order to elevate his mind by the inspiring sight of the sea.

He was full of that common sense which borders on stupidity. For a long time he had been living quietly, with economy, temperate through prudence, chaste by temperament, when suddenly he was assailed by a terrible apprehension. One evening in the street he suddenly felt an attack of dizziness that made him fear a stroke of apoplexy. He hastened to a physician and for five francs obtained the following prescription:

M. X——, fifty-five years old, bachelor, clerk. Full-blooded, danger of apoplexy. Cold-water applications, moderate nourishment, plenty of exercise.

MONTELLIER, M. D.

Patissot was greatly distressed, and for a whole month, in his office, he kept a wet towel wrapped round his head like a turban while the water continually dripped on his work, which he would have

to do over again. Every once in a while he would read the prescription over, probably in the hope of finding some hidden meaning, of penetrating into the secret thought of the physician, and also of discovering some forms of exercise that might make him immune from apoplexy.

Then he consulted his friends, showing them the fateful paper. One advised boxing. He immediately hunted up an instructor, and, on the first day, he received a punch in the nose that immediately took away all his ambition in this direction. Single-stick made him gasp for breath, and he grew so stiff from fencing that for two days and two nights he could not sleep. Then a bright idea struck him. This was to walk, every Sunday, to some suburb of Paris and even to certain places in the capital which he did not know.

For a whole week his mind was occupied with thoughts of the equipment needed for these excursions; and on Sunday, May 30, he began his preparations. After reading all the extraordinary advertisements that poor, blind, and halt beggars distribute on the street corners, he began to visit the stores with the intention of looking about him only and of buying afterward. First of all, he visited a so-called American shoe-store, where heavy traveling shoes were shown him. The clerk brought out a kind of ironclad contrivance, studded with spikes like a harrow, which he said was made from Rocky Mountain bison skin. Patissot was so carried away

with them that he would willingly have bought two pairs, but one was sufficient. He carried them away under his arm, which soon became numb from the weight. He next invested in a pair of corduroy trousers, such as carpenters wear, and a pair of oiled canvas leggings. Then he needed a knapsack for his provisions, a telescope so as to recognize villages on the slope of distant hills, and finally a government survey map to enable him to find his way about without asking the peasants toiling in the fields. Lastly, in order more comfortably to stand the heat, he decided to purchase a light alpaca jacket offered by the famous firm of Raminau, according to their advertisement, for the modest sum of six francs and fifty centimes. He went to this store and was welcomed by a distinguished-looking young man with a marvelous head of hair, nails as pink as a lady's, and a pleasant smile. He showed him the garment. It did not correspond with the glowing style of the advertisement. Then Patissot hesitatingly asked, "Well, Monsieur, will it wear well?" The young man turned his eyes away in well-feigned embarrassment, like an honest man who does not wish to deceive a customer, and, lowering his eyes, he said in a hesitating manner: "Dear me, Monsieur, you understand that for six francs fifty we cannot turn out an article like this, for instance." And he showed him a much finer jacket than the first one. Patissot examined it and asked the price. "Twelve francs fifty." It was very tempting, but before de-

ciding, he once more questioned the big young man, who was observing him attentively. "And—is that good? Do you guarantee it?" "Oh! certainly, Monsieur, it is quite good! But, of course, you must not get it wet! Yes, it's really quite good, but you understand that there are goods and goods. It's excellent for the price. Twelve francs fifty, just think. Why, that's nothing at all. Naturally a twenty-five-franc coat is much better. For twenty-five francs you get a superior quality, as strong as linen, and one that wears even better. If it gets wet a little ironing will remedy matters. The color never fades, and it does not turn red in the sunlight. It is the warmest and lightest material sold."

He unfolded his wares, holding them up, shaking them, crumpling and stretching them in order to show the excellent quality of the cloth. He talked on convincingly, dispelling all hesitation by words and gesture. Patissot was convinced; he bought the coat. The pleasant salesman, still talking, tied up the bundle and continued praising the value of the purchase. When it was paid for he was suddenly silent. He bowed with a superior air, and, holding the door open, he watched his customer disappear, both arms filled with bundles and vainly trying to reach his hat to bow.

Monsieur Patissot returned home and carefully studied the map. He wished to try on his shoes, which were more like skates than shoes, owing to the spikes. He slipped and fell, promising himself

to be more careful in future. Then he spread out all his purchases on a chair and looked at them for a long time. He went to sleep with this thought: "Isn't it strange that I didn't think before of taking an excursion to the country?"

Patissot worked without ambition all through the week. He was dreaming of the outing he had planned for the following Sunday, and he was seized by a sudden longing for the country, a desire of growing tender over nature, that thirst for rustic scenes which overwhelms Parisians in springtime.

Only one person gave him any attention; this was a silent old copying-clerk named Boivin, nicknamed Boileau. He himself lived in the country and had a little garden, which he cultivated carefully; his needs were small and he was perfectly happy, so they said. Patissot was now able to understand his tastes and the similarity of their ideals made them immediately fast friends. Old man Boivin said to him:

"Do I like fishing, Monsieur? Why, it's the delight of my life!"

Then Patissot questioned him with deep interest. Boivin named all the fish that frolicked under this dirty water—and Patissot thought he could see them. Boivin told about the different hooks, baits, spots and times suitable for each kind. And Patissot felt himself more like a fisherman than Boivin himself. They agreed that the following Sunday they would meet for the opening of the season for the

edification of Patissot, who was delighted to have found such an experienced instructor.

A FISHING EXCURSION

The day before the one when, for the first time in his life, he was to throw a hook into a river, Monsieur Patissot bought, for eighty centimes, "How to Become a Perfect Fisherman." From this work he learned many useful things, but he was especially impressed by the style, and he retained the following passage:

"In a word, if you wish, without books, without rules, to fish successfully, to the left or to the right, up or down stream, in the masterly manner that halts at no difficulty, then fish before, during, and after a storm, when the clouds break and the sky is streaked with lightning, when the earth shakes with the grumbling thunder; it is then that, either through hunger or terror, all the fish forget their habits in a turbulent flight."

In this confusion follow or neglect all favorable signs, and just go on fishing; you will march to victory!

In order to catch fish of all sizes, he bought three well-perfected poles, made to be used as a cane in the city, which, on the river could be transformed into a fishing-rod by a simple jerk. He bought number fifteen hooks for gudgeon, number twelve for bream, and with his number seven he expected to fill his basket with carp. He bought no earth-

worms, because he was sure of finding them everywhere; but he laid in a provision of sand-worms. He had a jar full of them, and in the evening he watched them with interest. The hideous creatures swarmed in their bath of bran as they do in putrid meat. Patissot wished to practise baiting his hook. He took up one with disgust, but he had hardly placed the curved steel point against it when it split open. Twenty times he repeated this without success, and he might have continued all night had he not feared to exhaust his supply of worms.

He left by the first train. The station was full of people equipped with fishing-lines. Some, like Patissot's, looked like simple bamboo canes; others, in one piece, pointed their smaller ends to the skies. They looked like a forest of slender sticks, which mingled and clashed like swords or swayed like masts over an ocean of broad-brimmed straw hats.

When the train started, fishing-rods could be seen sticking out of all the windows and doors, giving it the appearance of a huge, bristly caterpillar winding through the fields.

Everybody got off at Courbevoie and rushed for the stage for Bezons. A crowd of fishermen mounted to the top of the coach, holding their rods in their hands, giving the vehicle the appearance of a porcupine.

All along the road men were traveling in the same direction as if on a pilgrimage to an unknown Jerusalem. They were carrying long, slender sticks

resembling those carried by the faithful on returning from Palestine. Tin boxes were strapped to their backs. They were in a hurry.

At Bezons the river appeared. People were lined along both banks, men in frock coats, others in duck suits, others in blouses, women, children, and even young girls of marriageable age; all were fishing.

Patissot set out for the dam where his friend Boivin was waiting for him. The latter greeted him rather coolly. He had just made the acquaintance of a big, fat man of about fifty, who seemed very strong and whose skin was tanned. All three hired a big boat and lay off almost under the fall of the dam, where the fish are most plentiful.

Boivin was immediately ready. He baited his line and threw it out, and then sat motionless, watching the little float with extraordinary concentration. From time to time he would jerk his line out of the water and cast it farther out. The fat gentleman threw out his well-baited hooks, put his line down beside him, filled his pipe, lighted it, crossed his arms, and, without another glance at the cork, looked at the water flowing by. Patissot once more tried to stick sand-worms on his hooks. After about five minutes of this occupation he called to Boivin: "Monsieur Boivin, would you be so kind as to help me put these creatures on my hook? Try as I will, I don't succeed." Boivin raised his head: "Please don't disturb me, Monsieur Patissot; we are not here for pleasure!" However, he baited the

line which Patissot then threw out, carefully imitating all the motions of his friend.

The boat was tossing wildly, shaken by the waves, although anchored at both ends. Patissot, absorbed in the sport, felt a vague kind of uneasiness; he was uncomfortably heavy and somewhat dizzy.

They caught nothing. Little Boivin, very nervous, was gesticulating and shaking his head in despair. Patissot was as sad as if some disaster had overtaken him. The fat gentleman alone, still motionless, was quietly smoking without paying any attention to his line. At last Patissot, disgusted, turned toward him and said in a mournful voice:

"They are not biting, are they?"

He quietly replied:

"Of course not!"

Patissot, surprised, looked at him.

"Do you ever catch many?"

"Never!"

"What! Never?"

The fat man still smoking like a factory chimney, uttered the following words, which completely upset his neighbor:

"It would bother me if they *did* bite. I don't come here to fish; I come because I'm very comfortable here; I get shaken up as if I were at sea. If I take a line along, it's only to do as others do."

Monsieur Patissot, on the other hand, did not feel at all well. His discomfort, at first vague, kept increasing, and finally assumed a definite form. He

felt, indeed, as if he were being tossed by the sea, and was suffering from seasickness. After the first attack had calmed down, he proposed leaving, but Boivin grew so furious that they almost came to blows. The fat man, moved by pity, rowed the boat back, and, as soon as Patissot had recovered from his seasickness, they bethought themselves of luncheon.

Two restaurants presented themselves. One of them, very small, looked like a beer garden, and was patronized by the poorer fishermen. The other which bore the imposing name of "Linden Cottage," looked like a middle-class residence and was frequented by the aristocracy of the rod. The two owners, born enemies, watched each other with hatred across a large field, which separated them, and where the white house of the dam-keeper and the inspector of the life-saving department stood out against the green grass. Moreover, these two officials disagreed, one of them upholding the beer garden and the other one defending the Elms; and the internal feuds that arose in these three houses reproduced the whole history of mankind.

Boivin, who knew the beer garden, wished to go there, exclaiming: "The food is very good, and it isn't expensive; you'll see. Anyhow, Monsieur Patissot, you needn't expect to get me tipsy, as you did last Sunday. My wife was furious, you know; and she has sworn never to forgive you!"

The fat gentleman declared that he would eat

nowhere but at the Elms, because it was an excellent place and the cooking was as good as in the best restaurants in Paris.

"Do as you wish," declared Boivin; "I am going where I am accustomed to go," and he left. Patissot, displeased at his friend's actions, followed the fat gentleman.

They ate together, exchanged ideas, discussed opinions, and found that they were made for each other.

After the meal every one set out to fish again, and the two new friends left together. Following along the banks, they stopped near the railroad bridge and, still talking, threw in their lines. The fish still refused to bite, but Patissot was now making the best of it.

A family was approaching. The father, whose whiskers stamped him as a judge, was holding an extraordinarily long rod; three boys of different sizes were carrying poles of different lengths, according to age; and the mother, who was very stout, gracefully maneuvered a charming rod with a ribbon tied to the handle. The father bowed and asked: "Is this spot good, gentlemen?" Patissot was going to speak, when his friend answered: "Fine!" The whole family smiled and settled down beside the fishermen. Then Patissot was seized with a wild desire to catch a fish, just one, any kind, any size, in order to win the consideration of these people; so he began to handle his rod as he had seen

Boivin do in the morning. He would let the cork follow the current to the end of the line, jerk the hooks out of the water, make them describe a large circle in the air and throw them out again a little farther up. He had even, as he thought, caught the knack of doing this movement gracefully. He had just jerked his line out rapidly when he felt it caught in something. He tugged, and a scream burst from behind him. He perceived, caught on one of his hooks, and describing in the air a curve like a meteor, a magnificent hat, which he placed right in the middle of the river.

He turned round, bewildered. and dropped his pole, which followed the hat down the stream, while the fat gentleman, his new friend, lay on his back and roared with laughter. The lady, hatless and astounded, choked with anger; her husband was outraged and demanded the price of the hat, and Patissot paid about three times its value.

Then the family departed in a very dignified manner.

Patissot took another rod, and, until nightfall, he gave baths to sand-worms. His neighbor was sleeping peacefully on the grass. Toward seven in the evening he awoke.

"Let's go away!" he said.

Then Patissot withdrew his line, gave a cry, and sat down hard from astonishment. At the end of the string was a little fish. When they looked at him more closely they found that he had been

hooked through the stomach; the hook had caught him as it was being drawn out of the water.

Patissot was filled with a boundless, triumphant joy; he wished to have the fish fried for himself alone.

During the dinner the friends grew still more intimate. He learned that the fat gentleman lived at Argenteuil and had been sailing boats for thirty years without losing interest in the sport. Patissot accepted an invitation to take luncheon with him the following Sunday and to take a sail in his friend's clipper, *Plongeon*. He became so interested in the conversation that he forgot all about his catch. He did not remember it until after the coffee, and then he demanded that it be brought to him. It was alone in the middle of a platter, and looked like a yellow, twisted match. But he ate it with pride and relish, and at night, on the omnibus, he told his neighbors that he had caught fourteen pounds of fish that day.

TWO CELEBRITIES

Though Monsieur Patissot had promised his friend, the boating man, that he would spend the following Sunday with him, an unforeseen occurrence changed his plan. One evening, on the boulevard, he met one of his cousins whom he saw but seldom. He was a pleasant journalist, well received in all classes of society, who offered to show Patissot many interesting things.

"What are you going to do next Sunday?"

"I'm going boating at Argenteuil."

"Come on! Boating is an awful bore; there is no variety to it. Listen—I'll take you along with me. I'll introduce you to two celebrities. We will visit the homes of two artists."

"But I have been ordered to go to the country!"

"That's just where we'll go. On the way we'll call on Meissonier, at his place in Poissy; then we'll walk over to Médan, where Zola lives. I have been commissioned to obtain his next novel for our newspaper."

Patissot, wild with joy, accepted the invitation. He even bought a new frock coat, as his own was too much worn to make a good appearance. He was afraid of saying something foolish either to the artist or to the man of letters, as do those who speak of an art they never have professed.

He mentioned his fears to his cousin, who laughed and answered: "Pshaw! Just pay them compliments, nothing but compliments, always compliments; in that way, if you say anything foolish it will be overlooked. Do you know Meissonier's paintings?"

"I should say I do."

"Have you read the Rougon-Macquart series?"

"From first to last."

"That's enough. Mention a painting from time to time, speak of a novel here and there, and add: 'Superb! Extraordinary! Delightful technique!

Wonderfully powerful!' In that way you can always get along. I know that those two are blasé about everything, but admiration always pleases an artist."

Sunday morning they left for Poissy. A few steps from the station, at the end of the church square, they found Meissonier's property. After passing through a low door, painted red, which led into a beautiful alley of vines, the journalist stopped and, turning toward his companion, asked:

"What is your idea of Meissonier?"

Patissot hesitated. At last he decided: "A little man, well groomed, clean shaven, a soldierly appearance." The other smiled: "All right, come along." A quaint building in the form of a chalet appeared to the left; and to the right side, almost opposite, was the main house. It was a strange-looking building, a mingling of Gothic fortress, manor, villa, hut, residence, cathedral, mosque, pyramid, a weird combination of Eastern and Western architecture. The style was complicated enough to set a classical architect crazy, and yet there was something whimsical and pretty about it. It had been invented and built under the direction of the artist.

They went in; a collection of trunks encumbered a little parlor. A little man appeared, dressed in a jumper. The striking thing about him was his beard. He bowed to the journalist, and said: "My dear sir, I hope you will excuse me; I returned

only yesterday, and everything is all upset here. Please be seated." The other refused, excusing himself: "My dear master, I dropped in merely to pay my respects while passing by." Patissot, very much embarrassed, was bowing at every word of his friend's, as if moving automatically, and he murmured, stammering: "What a su-su-superb property!" The artist, flattered, smiled, and suggested visiting it.

He led them first to a little pavilion of feudal aspect, when his former studio was. Then they crossed a parlor, a dining-room, a vestibule full of works of art, of beautiful Beauvais, Gobelins and Flanders tapestries. But the strange external luxury of ornamentation became, inside, a revel of immense stairways. A magnificent grand stairway, a secret stairway in one tower, a servants' stairway in another, stairways everywhere! Patissot, by chance, opened a door and stepped back astonished. It was a veritable temple, this place of which respectable people mention the name only in English, an original and charming sanctuary in exquisite taste, fitted up like a pagoda, the decoration of which must certainly have caused a great deal of work.

They next visited the park, which was complex, varied, with winding paths and full of old trees. But the journalist insisted on going; and, with many thanks, he took leave of the master. As they left they met a gardener, and Patissot asked him:

"Has Monsieur Meissonier owned this place for a long time?" The man answered: "Oh, Monsieur! that needs explaining. I think he bought the grounds in 1846. But, as for the house! he has already torn down and rebuilt that five or six times. It must have cost him at least two millions!" As Patissot left he conceived an immense respect for this man, not on account of his success, glory or talent, but for putting so much money into a whim, because the bourgeois deprive themselves of all pleasure in order to hoard money.

After crossing Poissy, they struck out on foot along the road to Médan. The road first followed the Seine, which is dotted with charming islands at this place. Then they went up a hill and crossed the pretty village of Villaines, went down a little, and finally reached the neighborhood inhabited by the author of the Rougon-Macquart series.

A pretty old church with two towers appeared on the left. They walked along a short distance, and a passing farmer directed them to the writer's dwelling.

Before entering, they examined the house. A large building, square and new, very high, seemed, as in the fable of the mountain and the mouse, to have given birth to a tiny little white house, which nestled near it. This little house was the original dwelling, and had been built by the former owner. The tower had been erected by Zola.

They rang the bell. An enormous dog, a cross between a Saint Bernard and a Newfoundland, be-

gan to howl so terribly that Patissot felt a desire to retrace his steps. But a servant ran forward, calmed "Bertrand," opened the door, and took the journalist's card to carry it to his master.

"I hope he will receive us!" murmured Patissot. "It would be too bad if we had come all this distance and then could not see him."

His companion smiled and answered: "Never fear, I have a plan for getting in."

But the servant, who had returned, simply asked them to follow him.

They entered the new building, and Patissot, who was quite enthusiastic, was panting as he climbed a stairway of ancient style.

At the same time he was trying to picture to himself this man whose glorious name echoes at present in all corners of the earth, amid the exasperated hatred of some, the real or feigned indignation of society, the envious scorn of several of his colleagues, the respect of a mass of readers, and the frenzied admiration of a great number. He expected to see a kind of bearded giant, of awe-inspiring aspect, with a thundering voice and an appearance little prepossessing at first.

The door opened on a room uncommonly large, broad and high, lighted by an enormous window looking out over the valley. Old tapestries covered the walls; on the left, a monumental fireplace, flanked by two stone men, could have burned a century-old oak in one day. An immense table lit-

tered with books, papers and magazines stood in the middle of this apartment so vast and grand that it first engrossed the eye, and the attention was only afterward drawn to the man, stretched out on an Oriental divan where twenty persons could have slept. He took a few steps toward them, bowed, motioned to two seats, and turned back to his divan, where he sat with one leg drawn under him. A book lay open beside him, and in his right hand he held an ivory paper-cutter, the end of which he observed from time to time with one eye, closing the other with the persistency of a near-sighted person.

While the journalist explained the purpose of the visit, and the writer listened to him without answering, at times staring at him fixedly, Patissot, more and more embarrassed, was observing this celebrity.

He was of medium height, hardly forty, fairly stout and had a good-natured look. His head (very similar to those found in many Italian paintings of the sixteenth century), without being beautiful in the plastic sense of the word, gave an impression of great strength of character, power and intelligence. Short hair stood up straight on the high, well-developed forehead. A straight nose stopped short, as if cut off suddenly above the upper lip which was covered with a black moustache; over the whole chin was a closely-cropped beard. The dark, often ironical look was piercing; one felt that

behind it there was a mind always actively at work observing people, interpreting words, analyzing gestures, uncovering the heart. This strong, round head was appropriate to his name, quick and short, with the bounding resonance of the two vowels.

When the journalist had fully explained his proposal, the writer answered that he did not wish to make any definite arrangement, that he would, however, think the matter over, that his plans were not yet sufficiently defined. Then he stopped. This was a dismissal, and the two men, a little confused, arose. A desire seized Patissot; he wished this well-known person to say something to him, anything, some word which he could repeat to his colleagues; and, growing bold, he stammered: "Oh, Monsieur! If you knew how I appreciate your works!" The other bowed, but answered nothing. Patissot became very bold and continued: "It is a great honor for me to speak to you to-day." The writer once more bowed, but with a stiff and impatient look. Patissot noticed it, and, completely losing his head, he added as he retreated: "What a su-su-superb property!"

Then, in the heart of the man of letters, the landowner awoke, and, smiling, he opened the window to show them the immense stretch of view. An endless horizon broadened out on all sides, giving a view of Triel, Pisse-Fontaine, Chanteloup, all the heights of Hautrie, and the Seine as far as the eye could see. The two visitors, delighted, congratulated him, and the house was opened to them. They

saw everything, down to the dainty kitchen, whose walls and even ceilings were covered with porcelain tiles ornamented with blue designs, which excited the wonder of the farmers.

"How did you happen to buy this place?" asked the journalist.

The novelist explained that, while looking for a cottage to hire for the summer, he had found the little house, which was for sale for several thousand francs, a song, almost nothing. He immediately bought it.

"But everything that you have added must have cost you a great deal!"

The writer smiled, and answered: "Yes, quite a little."

The two men left. The journalist, taking Patissot by the arm, was philosophizing in a low voice. "Every general has his Waterloo," he said; "every Balzac has his Jardies, and every artist living in the country feels like a landed proprietor."

They took the train at the station of Villaines, and, on the way home, Patissot loudly mentioned the names of the famous painter and of the great novelist as if they were his friends. He even allowed people to think he had taken luncheon with one and dinner with the other.

BEFORE THE CELEBRATION

The celebration is approaching, and preliminary quivers are already running through the streets, just

as ripples disturb the water preparatory to a storm. The shops, draped with flags, display a variety of gay bunting, and the dry-goods people deceive one about the three colors as grocers do about the weight of candles. Little by little, hearts warm up to the matter; people speak about it in the street after dinner; ideas are exchanged:

"What a celebration it will be, my friend; what a celebration!"

"Have you heard the news? All the rulers are coming incognito, as bourgeois, in order to see it."

"I hear that the Emperor of Russia has arrived; he expects to go about everywhere with the Prince of Wales."

"It certainly will be a fine celebration!"

It is going to be a celebration; what Monsieur Patissot, Parisian bourgeois, calls a celebration; one of these nameless tumults which, for fifteen hours, roll from one end of the city to the other, every ugly specimen dressed in its finest, a mob of perspiring bodies, where side by side are tossed about the stout gossip bedecked in red, white and blue ribbons, grown fat behind her counter and panting from lack of breath, the rickety clerk with his wife and child in tow, the laborer carrying his youngster astride his neck, the bewildered provincial with his foolish, dazed expression, the groom, recently shaved and still spreading the perfume of the stable. And foreigners dressed like monkeys, English women like giraffes, the water-carrier,

cleaned up for the occasion, and the innumerable phalanx of little bourgeois, inoffensive people, amused at everything. All this crowding and pressing, the sweat, the dust, the turmoil, all these eddies of human flesh, trampling of corns beneath the feet of your neighbors, this city all topsy-turvy, these vile odors, these frantic efforts toward nothing, the breath of millions of people, all redolent of garlic, give to Monsieur Patissot all the joy that his heart can hold.

After reading the poclamation of the Mayor on the walls of his district he had made his preparations. This bit of prose said:

> I wish to call your attention particularly to the part of individuals in this celebration. Decorate your homes, illuminate your windows. Get together and open a subscription in order to give to your houses and your street a more brilliant and more artistic appearance than the neighboring houses and streets.

Then Monsieur Patissot tried to imagine how he could give to his home an artistic appearance. There was one serious obstacle. His only window looked out on a courtyard, a narrow, dark shaft, where only the rats could have seen his three Japanese lanterns.

He needed a public opening. He found it. On the first floor of his house lived a rich man, a nobleman and a royalist, whose coachman, also a reactionary, occupied a garret-room on the sixth floor, facing the street. Monsieur Patissot supposed that by paying (every conscience can be bought) he

could obtain the use of the room for the day. He proposed five francs to this citizen of the whip for the use of his room from noon till midnight. The offer was immediately accepted.

Then he busied himself with the decorations. Three flags, four lanterns, was that enough to give to this box an artistic appearance—to express all the noble feelings of his soul? No, assuredly not! But, notwithstanding diligent search and nightly meditation, Monsieur Patissot could think of nothing else. He consulted his neighbors, who were surprised at the question; he asked his colleagues —every one had bought lanterns and flags, some adding, for the occasion, red, white and blue bunting.

Then he began to rack his brains for some original idea. He frequented the cafés, questioning the patrons; they lacked imagination. Then one morning he went out on top of an omnibus. A respectable-looking gentleman was smoking a cigar beside him, a little farther away a laborer was smoking his pipe upside down, near the driver two rough fellows were joking, and clerks of every description were going to business for three cents.

Stacks of flags before the stores were resplendent in the rising sun. Patissot turned to his neighbor.

"It is to be a fine celebration," he said. The gentleman looked at him sidewise and answered haughtily: "That makes no difference to me!"

"You are not going to take part in it?" asked the surprised clerk. The other shook his head disdainfully and declared:

"They make me tired with their celebrations! Whose celebration is it? The government's? I do not recognize this government, Monsieur!"

But Patissot, as government employé, took on his superior manner, and answered in a stern voice:

"Monsieur, the Republic is the government."

His neighbor was not in the least disturbed, and, pushing his hands down in his pockets, he exclaimed:

"Well, and what then? It makes no difference to me. Whether it's for the Republic or something else, I don't care! What I want, Monsieur, is to know my government. I saw Charles Tenth and adhered to him, Monsieur; I saw Louis-Philippe and adhered to him, Monsieur; I saw Napoleon and adhered to him; but I never have seen the Republic."

Patissot, still serious, answered:

"The Republic, Monsieur, is represented by its president!"

The other grumbled:

"Well, then, show him to me!"

Patissot shrugged his shoulders.

"Every one can see him; he's not shut up in a closet!"

Suddenly the gentleman grew angry.

"Excuse me, Monsieur, he cannot be seen. I

personally have tried more than a hundred times, Monsieur. I have posted myself near the Elysée; he did not come out. A passer-by informed me that he was playing billiards in the café opposite; I went to the café opposite; he was not there. I had been promised that he would go to Melun for the convention; I went to Melun; I did not see him. At last I became weary. I did not even see Monsieur Gambetta, and I do not know a single deputy."

He was growing excited, and continued:

"A government, Monsieur, is made to be seen; that's what it's there for, and for nothing else. One must be able to know that on such and such a day at such an hour the government will pass through such and such a street. Then one goes there and is satisfied."

Patissot, now calm, was enjoying his arguments.

"It is true," he said, "that it is agreeable to know the people by whom one is governed."

The gentleman continued more gently:

"Do you know how I would manage the celebration? Well, Monsieur, I would have a procession of gilded cars, like the chariots used at the crowning of kings; in them I would parade all the members of the government, from the president to the deputies, throughout Paris all day long. In that manner, at least, every one would know by sight the personnel of the state."

But one of the roughs near the coachman turned around, exclaiming:

"And the fatted ox, where would you put him?"

A laugh ran round the two benches. Patissot understood the objection, and murmured:

"It might not be very dignified."

The gentleman thought the matter over and admitted it.

"Then," he said, "I would place them in view somewhere, so that every one could see them without going out of his way; on the Triumphal Arch at the Place de l'Etoile, for instance; and I would have the whole population pass before them. That would be very imposing."

Once more the rough turned round and said:

"You'd have to take telescopes to see their faces."

The gentleman did not answer; he continued:

"It's just like the presentation of the flags! There should be some pretext, a mimic war ought to be organized, and the banners should be given to the troops as a reward. I had an idea about which I wrote to the minister; but he has not deigned to answer me. As the taking of the Bastille has been chosen for the date of the national celebration, a reproduction of this event might be made; there would be a pasteboard Bastille, fixed up by a scene-painter and concealing within its walls the whole Column of July. Then, Monsieur, the troop would attack. That would be a magnificent spectacle as well as a lesson, to see the army itself overthrow the ramparts of tyranny. Then this Bastille would be set fire to and from the midst of

the flames would appear the Column with the genius of Liberty, symbol of a new order and of the freedom of the people."

This time every one was listening to him and finding his idea excellent. An old gentleman exclaimed:

"That is a great idea, Monsieur, and it does you honor. It is to be regretted that the government did not adopt it."

A young man declared that actors ought to recite the "Iambes" of Barbier through the streets, to teach the people art and liberty simultaneously.

These propositions excited general enthusiasm. Each one wished to have his word; all were wrought up. From a passing hand-organ a few strains of the Marseillaise were heard; the laborer started the song, and everybody joined in, roaring out the chorus. The wild rhythm fired the driver, who lashed his horses to a gallop. Monsieur Patissot was bawling at the top of his lungs, and the inside passengers wondered what hurricane had struck them.

At last they stopped, and Monsieur Patissot, judging his neighbor to be a man of initiative, consulted him about the preparations he expected to make.

"Lanterns and flags are all right," said Patissot; "but I prefer something better."

The other thought for a long time, but found nothing. Then, in despair, the clerk bought three flags and four lanterns.

AN EXPERIMENT IN LOVE

Many poets think nature is incomplete without women, and hence, doubtless, come all the flowery comparisons which, in their songs, make our natural companion in turn a rose, a violet, a tulip, or something of that order. The need of tenderness, which seizes us at dusk, when the evening mist begins to roll in from the hills, and when all the perfumes of the earth intoxicate us, is but imperfectly satisfied by lyric invocations. Monsieur Patissot, like all others, was seized with a wild desire for tenderness, for sweet kisses exchanged along a path where sunshine steals in at times, for the pressure of a pair of small hands, for a supple waist, yielding to his embrace.

He began to look at love as an unbounded pleasure, and, in his hours of reverie he thanked the Great Unknown for having put so much charm into the caresses of human beings. But he needed a companion, and knew not where to find one. On the advice of a friend, he went to the Folies-Bergère, where he saw a complete assortment. He was greatly perplexed to choose among them, for the desires of his heart were chiefly poetic impulses, and poetry did not seem to be the strong point of these young ladies with penciled eyebrows, who smiled at him in such a disturbing manner, showing the enamel of their false teeth. At last his choice fell on a young beginner who appeared poor and

timid and whose sad look seemed to indicate a nature easily influenced by poetry.

He made an appointment with her for the following day at nine o'clock at the Saint-Lazare station. She did not come, but she was kind enough to send a friend in her stead.

This friend was a tall, red-haired girl, patriotically dressed in three colors, and covered by an immense tunnel hat, of which her head occupied the center. Monsieur Patissot, a little disappointed, nevertheless accepted the substitute, and they left for Maisons-Laffitte, where regattas and a grand Venetian festival had been announced.

As soon as they were in the car, which was already occupied by two gentlemen who wore the red ribbon and three ladies who were so dignified they must have been at least duchesses, the big red-haired girl, who answered to the name of Octavie, announced to Patissot, in a shrill voice, that she was a fine girl fond of a good time and loving the country because there she could pick flowers and eat fried fish. Her piercing laugh almost shattered the windows, as she familiarly called her companion "My big darling."

Shame overwhelmed Patissot, who, as a government employé, had to observe a certain amount of decorum. But Octavie stopped talking, glancing at her neighbors, seized with the overpowering desire that haunts all women of a certain class to make the acquaintance of respectable women. Five min-

utes later she thought she had found an opening and, drawing from her pocket a *Gil-Blas,* she politely offered it to one of the amazed ladies, who declined, shaking her head. Then the big, red-haired girl began saying things with a double meaning, speaking of women who are *stuck up* without being any better than the others; sometimes she would utter a vulgar word which acted like a bomb exploding amid the icy dignity of the passengers.

At last they arrived. Patissot immediately wished to gain the shady nooks of the park, hoping that the melancholy of the forest would quiet the ruffled temper of his companion. But an entirely different effect resulted. As soon as she was amid the leaves and grass she began to sing, at the top of her lungs, snatches from operas which had stuck in her frivolous mind, warbling and trilling, passing from "Robert le Diable" to the "Muette," lingering especially on a sentimental love-song, whose last stanzas she sang in a voice as piercing as a gimlet.

Then suddenly she grew hungry. Patissot, who was still awaiting the hoped-for tenderness, tried in vain to retain her. Then she grew angry, exclaiming:

"I am not here for a dull time, am I?"

He had to take her to the Petit-Havre restaurant, near the place where the regatta was to be held.

She ordered an endless luncheon, a succession of dishes substantial enough to feed a regiment. Then,

unable to wait, she called for relishes. A box of sardines was brought; she began on it as if she intended to swallow the box itself. But when she had eaten two or three of the little oily fish she declared she was no longer hungry and that she wished to see the preparations for the race.

Patissot, in despair and in his turn seized with hunger, absolutely refused to move. She thereupon set out alone, promising to return in time for the dessert. He began to eat in lonely silence, not knowing how to lead this rebellious nature to the realization of his dreams.

As she did not return he went in search of her. She had found some friends, a troop of boatmen, in scanty garb, sunburned to the tips of their ears, and gesticulating, who were loudly arranging the details of the race in front of the house of Fourmaise, the builder.

Two respectable-looking gentlemen, probably the judges, were listening attentively. As soon as she saw Patissot, Octavie, who was leaning on the tanned arm of a strapping fellow who probably had more muscle than brains, whispered a few words in his ears. He answered:

"That's an agreement."

She returned to the clerk full of joy.

"Let's go for a row," said she.

Pleased to see her so charming, he acceded to this new whim and procured a boat. But she obstinately refused to go to the races, notwithstanding Patissot's wishes.

"I had rather be alone with you, darling."

His heart thrilled. At last!

He took off his coat and began to row rapidly.

An old dilapidated mill, whose worm-eaten wheels hung over the water, stood with its two arches across a little arm of the river. Slowly they passed beneath it, and, when they were on the other side, they noticed before them a delightful little stretch of river, shaded by great trees which formed an arch over their heads. The little stream flowed along, winding first to the right and then to the left, continually revealing new scenes, broad fields on one side and on the other side a hill covered with cottages. They passed before a bathing establishment almost entirely hidden by the foliage, a charming country spot where gentlemen in clean gloves and beribboned ladies displayed all the ridiculous awkwardness of elegant people in the country. She cried joyously:

"By and bye we will take a dip there."

Farther on, in a kind of bay, she wished to stop, coaxing:

"Come here, dear, close to me."

She put her arm around his neck and, leaning her head on his shoulder, she murmured:

"How nice it is! How delightful it is on the water!"

Patissot was reveling in happiness. He was thinking of those foolish boatmen who, without ever feeling the penetrating charm of the river

banks and the delicate grace of the reeds, row along out of breath, perspiring and tired out, from the tavern where they take luncheon to the tavern where they take dinner.

He was so comfortable that he fell asleep. When he awoke, he was alone. He called, but no one answered. Anxious, he climbed up on the side of the river, fearing that some accident might have happened.

Then, in the distance, coming in his direction, he saw a long, slender gig which four oarsmen as black as negroes were driving through the water like an arrow. It came nearer, skimming over the water; a woman was holding the tiller. Heavens! It looked —it was she! In order to regulate the rhythm of the stroke, she was singing in her shrill voice a boating song, which she interrupted for a minute as she got in front of Patissot. Then, throwing him a kiss, she cried:

"You silly goose!"

A DINNER AND SOME OPINIONS

On the occasion of the national celebration Monsieur Antoine Perdrix, chief of Monsieur Patissot's department, was made a knight of the Legion of Honor. He had been in service for thirty years under preceding governments, and for ten years under the present one. His employees, although grumbling a little at being thus rewarded in the person of their chief, thought it wise, nevertheless, to

offer him a cross studded with paste diamonds. The new knight, in turn, not wishing to be outdone, invited them all to dinner for the following Sunday, at his place at Asnières.

The house, decorated with Moorish ornaments, looked like a *café concert,* but its location gave it value, as the railroad cut through the garden, passing within a hundred and fifty feet of the porch. On the regulation plot of grass stood a basin of Roman cement, containing goldfish and a stream of water the size of that which comes from a syringe, which occasionally made microscopic rainbows at which the guests marveled.

The feeding of this irrigator was the constant preoccupation of Monsieur Perdrix, who would sometimes get up at five o'clock in the morning in order to fill the tank. Then, in his shirt-sleeves, his big stomach almost bursting from his trousers, he would pump energetically, so that on returning from the office he could have the satisfaction of letting the fountain play and of imagining that it was cooling off the garden.

On the night of the official dinner all the guests, one after the other, went into ecstasies over the surroundings and each time they heard a train in the distance Monsieur Perdrix announced to them its destination: Saint-Germain, Le Havre, Cherbourg, or Dieppe, and they playfully waved to the passengers leaning from the windows.

The whole office force was there. First came

Monsieur Capitaine, the assistant chief; Monsieur Patissot, chief clerk; then Messieurs de Sombreterre and Vallin, elegant young employees who came to the office only when they had to; lastly Monsieur Rade, known throughout the ministry for the absurd doctrines which he upheld, and the copying clerk, Monsieur Boivin.

Monsieur Rade passed for a character. Some called him a dreamer or an idealist, others a revolutionary; every one agreed that he was very clumsy. He was old, thin and small, with bright eyes and long, white hair, and had all his life professed a profound contempt for administrative work. A book rummager and a great reader, with a nature continually in revolt against everything, a seeker of truth and a despiser of popular prejudices, he had a clear yet paradoxical manner of expressing his opinions which closed the mouths of self-satisfied fools and of those that were discontented without knowing why. People said: "That old fool of a Rade," or else: "That harebrained Rade;" and the slowness of his promotion seemed to indicate the reason, according to commonplace minds. His freedom of speech often made his colleagues tremble; they asked themselves with terror how he had been able to keep his place as long as he had. As soon as they had seated themselves, Monsieur Perdrix thanked his "collaborators" in a neat little speech, promising them his protection, the more valuable as his power grew, and he ended with a stirring perora-

tion in which he thanked and glorified a government so liberal and just that it knows how to seek out the worthy from among the humble.

Monsieur Capitaine, the assistant chief, answered in the name of the office, congratulated, greeted, exalted, sang the praises of all. Frantic applause greeted these two bits of eloquence, after which they settled down to the business of eating.

Everything went well up to the dessert; lack of conversation was unnoticed. But after the coffee a discussion arose, and Monsieur Rade let himself loose and soon began to overstep the bounds of discretion.

They naturally discussed love, and a breath of chivalry intoxicated this room full of bureaucrats; they praised and exalted the superior beauty of woman, the delicacy of her soul, her aptitude for exquisite things, the correctness of her judgment, and the refinement of her sentiments. Monsieur Rade protested, energetically refusing to credit the so-called "fair" sex with all the qualities they ascribed to it; then, amidst the general indignation, he quoted several authors:

"Schopenhauer, gentlemen, Schopenhauer, the great philosopher, revered by all Germany, says: 'Man's intelligence must have been terribly deadened by love in order to call this sex with the small waist, narrow shoulders, large hips and crooked legs, the fair sex. All its beauty lies in the instinct of love. Instead of calling it the fair, it would have

been better to call it the unæsthetic sex. Women have neither the appreciation nor the knowledge of music, any more than they have of poetry or of the plastic arts; with them it is merely an apelike imitation, pure pretense, affectation cultivated from their desire to please.' "

"The man who said that is an idiot!" exclaimed Monsieur de Sombreterre.

Monsieur Rade smilingly continued:

"And how about Rousseau, gentlemen? Here is his opinion: 'Women, as a rule, love no art, are skilled in none, and have no talent.' "

Monsieur de Sombreterre disdainfully shrugged his shoulders:

"Then Rousseau is as much of a fool as the other, that's all."

Monsieur Rade, still smiling, continued:

"And this is what Lord Byron said, who, nevertheless, loved women: 'They should be well fed and well dressed, but not allowed to mingle with society. They should also be taught religion, but they should ignore poetry and politics, only being allowed to read religious works or cook-books.'

"You see, gentlemen, they all study painting and music. But not a single one of them has ever painted a remarkable picture or composed a great opera! Why, gentlemen? Because they are the *sexus sequior*, the secondary sex in every sense of the word, made to be kept apart, in the background."

Monsieur Patissot, growing angry, exclaimed:

"And how about Madame Sand, Monsieur?"

"She is the one exception, Monsieur, the one exception. I will quote to you another passage from another great philosopher, this one an Englishman, Herbert Spencer. Here is what he says: 'Each sex is capable, under the influence of abnormal stimulation, of manifesting faculties ordinarily reserved for the other one. Thus, for instance, in extreme cases a special excitement may cause the breasts of men to give milk; children deprived of their mothers have often thus been saved in time of famine. Nevertheless, we do not place this faculty of giving milk among the male attributes. It is the same with female intelligence, which, in certain cases, will give superior products, but which is not to be considered in an estimate of the feminine nature as a social factor."

All Monsieur Patissot's chivalric instincts were wounded and he declared:

"You are not a Frenchman, Monsieur. French gallantry is a form of patriotism."

Monsieur Rade retorted:

"I have very little patriotism, Monsieur, as little as I can get along with."

A coolness settled over the company, but he continued quietly:

"Do you admit with me that war is barbarous; that this custom of killing people constitutes a condition of savagery; that it is odious, when life

is the only real good, to see governments, whose duty is to protect the lives of their subjects, persistently looking for means of destruction? Am I not right? Then, if war is a terrible thing, what about patriotism, which is the idea at the base of it? When a murderer kills he has a fixed idea; it is to steal. When a good man sticks his bayonet through another good man, father of a family, or, perhaps, a great artist, what idea is he following out?"

Everybody was shocked. When one has such thoughts, one should not express them in public.

Monsieur Patissot continued:

"There are, however, Monsieur, principles which all good people recognize."

Monsieur Rade asked: "Which ones?"

Then very solemnly, Monsieur Patissot pronounced: "Morality, Monsieur."

Monsieur Rade, beaming, exclaimed:

"Let me give you just one little example, gentlemen. What is your opinion of the gentlemen with the silk caps who thrive along the boulevards on the delightful traffic which you know, and who make a living out of it?"

A look of disgust ran round the table.

"Well, gentlemen, only a century ago, when an elegant gentleman, very ticklish about his honor, had for—friend—a beautiful and rich lady, it was considered perfectly proper to live at her expense and even to squander her whole fortune. This game

was considered delightful. This only goes to show that the principles of morality are by no means settled—and that——"

Monsieur Perdrix, embarrassed, stopped him:

"Monsieur Rade, you are sapping the very foundations of society. One must always have principles. Thus, in politics, here is Monsieur de Sombreterre, who is a Legitimist; Monsieur Vallin, an Orleanist; Monsieur Patissot and I, Republicans; we all have very different principles, and yet we agree very well because we have them."

But Monsieur Rade exclaimed:

"I also have principles, gentlemen, very distinct ones."

Monsieur Patissot raised his head and coldly asked:

"It would please me greatly to know them, Monsieur."

Monsieur Rade did not need to be coaxed.

"Here they are, Monsieur:

"*First principle*—Government by one person is a monstrosity.

"*Second principle*—Restricted suffrage is an injustice.

"*Third principle*—Universal suffrage is idiotic.

"To deliver up millions of men, superior minds, scientists, even geniuses, to the caprice and will of a being who, in an instant of gayety, madness, intoxication or love, would not hesitate to sacrifice everything for his exalted fancy, would spend the

wealth of the country amassed by others with difficulty, would have thousands of men slaughtered on battle-fields, all this appears to me—a simple logician—a monstrous aberration.

"But, admitting that a country must govern itself, to exclude, on some always debatable pretext, a part of the citizens from the administration of affairs is such an injustice that it seems to me unworthy of a further discussion.

"Universal suffrage remains. I suppose you will agree with me that geniuses are rare. Let us be liberal and say there are at present five in France. Now, let us add, perhaps, two hundred men with a decided talent, one thousand others possessing various talents, and ten thousand superior intellects. This is a staff of eleven thousand two hundred and five minds. After that you have the army of mediocrities followed by the multitude of fools. As the mediocrities and the fools always form the immense majority, it is impossible for them to elect an intelligent government.

"To be fair, I admit that logically universal suffrage seems to me the only admissible principle, but it is impracticable. Here are the reasons why:

"To make all the living forces of the country coöperate in the government, to represent all the interests, to take into account all the rights, is an ideal dream, but hardly practicable, because the only force that can be measured is that very one which should be neglected, the stupid strength of numbers.

According to your method, unintelligent numbers equal genius, knowledge, learning, wealth and industry. When you are able to give to a member of the Institute ten thousand votes to a ragman's one, one hundred votes for a great land-owner as against his farmers' ten, then you will have approached an equilibrium of forces and obtained a national representation which will really represent the strength of the nation. But I challenge you to do it.

"Here are my conclusions: Formerly, when a man was a failure at every other profession he turned photographer; now he has himself elected a deputy. A government thus composed will always be sadly lacking, incapable of evil as well as of good. On the other hand, a despot, if he be stupid, can do a vast deal of harm, while, if he be intelligent (which is very rare), he may do good.

"I cannot decide between these two forms of government; I declare myself to be an anarchist, that is to say, a partisan of that power which is the most unassuming, the least felt, the most liberal, in the broadest sense of the word, and revolutionary at the same time; by that I mean the everlasting enemy of this same power which can in no way be anything but defective. That's all!"

Cries of indignation rose about the table, and all, whether Legitimist, Orleanist or Republican through force of circumstances, grew red with anger. Monsieur Patissot especially was choking with rage, and, turning toward Monsieur Rade, he

cried: "Then, Monsieur, you believe in nothing?"

The other answered: "You are right, Monsieur."

The anger felt by all the guests prevented Monsieur Rade from continuing, and Monsieur Perdrix, as chief, closed the discussion.

"Enough, gentlemen! We each have our opinion, and we have no intention of changing it."

All agreed with these wise words. But Monsieur Rade wished to have the last word.

"I have, however, one moral," said he. "It is simple and always applicable. One sentence embraces the whole thought; here is it: *'Never do unto another that which you would not have him do unto you.'* I defy you to pick any flaw in this, while I will undertake to demolish your most sacred principles with three arguments."

This time there was no answer. But as they were going home at night, by couples, each one was saying to his companion: "Really, Monsieur Rade goes much too far. His mind must be unbalanced. He ought to be appointed assistant chief at the Charenton Asylum."

LITTLE LOUISE ROQUE

AT his usual hour, Médéric Rompel, the one-time soldier, familiarly called Médéric by the country folk, left the post-office of Roüy-le-Tors. After passing through the villages with his long stride, he crossed the fields of Villaume and reached the bank of the Brindille, following the path along the water's edge to the village of Carvelin, where he began to deliver letters. He walked quickly, following the course of the narrow stream, which frothed and murmured in its grassy bed beneath an arch of willow-trees.

Médéric continued on his way, with only this thought: "This first letter is for the Poivron family, then I have one for Monsieur Renardet; so I must go through the wood."

His blue blouse, fastened round his waist by a black leather belt, moved in a quick, regular fashion above the green hedge of willow-trees, and his heavy holly-stick kept time with his steady footfalls.

He crossed the Brindille on a bridge consisting

of a tree-trunk, with a handrail of rope, fastened at both ends to stakes driven into the ground.

The wood, which belonged to Monsieur Renardet, the Mayor of Carvelin and the largest landowner in the district, consisted of huge old trees, straight as columns and extending for about half a league along the left bank of the river, which served as a boundary to this vast dome of foliage. Alongside the water large shrubs had grown up in the sunlight; but under the trees nothing could be seen but moss, thick, soft, and yielding, from which arose, in the still air, an odor of dampness and of decaying wood.

Médéric slackened his pace, took off his black cap adorned with red lace, and wiped his forehead, for it was by this time hot in the meadows, though it was not yet eight o'clock in the morning.

After he had somewhat recovered from the effects of the heat and resumed his quick pace, he noticed at the foot of a tree a child's small knife. When he picked it up he discovered a thimble and also a needlecase not far away.

Having picked up these objects, he thought: "I'll hand them to the Mayor," and resumed his journey, but now he kept his eyes open, thinking he might find something else.

Suddenly he stopped short, as if he had struck against a wooden barrier. Ten paces in front of him lay stretched on her back on the moss a little girl, entirely nude, her face covered with a handkerchief. She was about twelve years old.

Médéric advanced on tiptoe, as if he apprehended some danger, and glanced at the little figure uneasily.

What was this? Probably she was asleep. Then he reflected that a person does not go to sleep naked at half-past seven in the morning in the cool shade of the trees. Then she must be dead, and he must be face to face with a crime. At this thought a cold chill ran through his frame, although he was an old soldier. Besides, a murder was a very rare thing in the country, and above all the murder of a child—he could not believe his eyes! But she showed no wound—nothing save a spot of blood on her leg. How, then, had she been killed?

He stopped beside her and gazed at her, while he leaned on his staff. Certainly, he must know her, for he knew all the inhabitants of the district; but, not being able to see her face, he could not guess her name. He stooped in order to take off the handkerchief that covered her face, then paused, with outstretched hand, restrained by an idea that occurred to him.

Had he a right to disarrange anything in the condition of the corpse before the official investigation took place? He pictured justice to himself as a kind of general whom nothing escapes, and who attaches as much importance to a lost button as to the stab of a knife in the stomach. Perhaps under this handkerchief evidence could be found to sus-

tain a charge of murder; in fact, if such proof were there it might lose its value if touched by an awkward hand.

He stood erect with the intention of hastening toward the Mayor's residence, but again thought held him back. If the little girl were still alive, by any chance, he could not leave her lying there in this way. He knelt very gently, a little distance from her, through precaution, and extended his hand toward her foot. It was icy cold, with the terrible coldness of death that leaves us no longer in doubt. The letter-carrier, as he touched her, felt his heart in his mouth, as he said himself afterward, and his lips grew parched. Rising abruptly, he rushed off toward Monsieur Renardet's house.

He walked faster than ever, with his stick under his arm, his hands clenched, and his head thrust forward, while his leather bag, filled with letters and newspapers, flapped at his side.

The Mayor's residence was at the end of the wood which served as a park, and one side of it was washed by the Brindille. It was a large, square house of gray stone, very old, and had stood many a siege in former days; at the end of it was a huge tower, twenty metres high, rising out of the water. From the top of this fortress one could formerly see all the surrounding country. It was called the Fox's Tower, without any one knowing exactly why; and from this appellation, no doubt, had come the name Renardet, borne by the owners of this

fief, which had remained in the same family, it was said, for more than two hundred years. For the Renardets formed part of the upper middle class, almost noble, to be met with so often in the province before the Revolution.

The postman burst into the kitchen where the servants were taking breakfast, and exclaimed:

"Is the Mayor up? I want to speak to him at once."

Médéric was recognized as a man of respectability and authority, and they understood that something serious had happened.

As soon as word was brought to Monsieur Renardet, he ordered the postman to be shown up to him. Pale and out of breath, holding his cap in his hand, Médéric found the Mayor seated at a long table covered with scattered papers.

He was a large, tall man, heavy and red-faced, strong as an ox, and was much liked in the district, though he was of an excessively violent temper. He was almost forty years old and had been a widower for six months, living on his estate like a country gentleman. His choleric temperament had often brought him into trouble, from which the magistrates of Roüy-le-Tors, like indulgent and prudent friends, had extricated him. Had he not one day thrown the conductor of the diligence from the top of his seat because he came near running over his retriever, Micmac? Had he not broken the ribs of a gamekeeper who had abused him for having

passed, gun in hand, through a neighbor's property? Had he not even caught by the collar the sub-prefect, who had stayed in the village during an administrative circuit, called by Monsieur Renardet an electioneering circuit; for he was opposed to the government, in accordance with family traditions?

"What's the matter, Médéric?" the Mayor asked.

"I have found a little girl dead in your woods, Monsieur."

Renardet arose, his face the color of a brick.

"What do you say—a little girl—dead?"

"Yes, M'sieur, a little girl, quite naked, on her back, with blood on her, dead—quite dead!"

The Mayor uttered an oath.

"I will wager that it is little Louise Roque!" he exclaimed. "I have just heard that she did not go home to her mother last night. Where did you find her?"

The postman described the spot, gave full details, and offered to conduct the Mayor to the place.

But Renardet became brusque.

"No, I don't need you," he said. "Send the watchman, the Mayor's secretary, and the doctor to me at once, and proceed on your rounds. Quick! quick! go, and tell them to meet me in the wood."

The letter-carrier, used to discipline, obeyed and withdrew, angry and grieved at not being able to be present at the investigation.

The Mayor, in his turn, prepared to go out, took his large soft hat, and paused for a few seconds on

the threshold of his abode. Before him stretched a wide lawn, in which were three large beds of flowers in full bloom, one facing the house and the others on each side of it. Farther on, the outlying trees of the wood rose skyward, while at the left, beyond the Brindille, which at that spot widened into a pond, could be seen long meadows, a smooth green flat sweep of country, intersected by trenches and hedges of pollards.

To the right, behind the stables, the outhouses and all the buildings connected with the property, might be seen the village, which was a well-to-do community, being inhabited mainly by cattle-breeders.

Renardet slowly descended the steps in front of his house, and, turning to the left, arrived at the water's edge, which he followed at a slow pace, his hand behind his back. He walked on, with bent head, and from time to time glanced around in search of the persons he had summoned.

When he stood beneath the trees he stopped, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead as Médéric had done; for the burning sun was darting its fiery rays on the earth. Then the Mayor resumed his journey, stopped once more, and retraced his steps. Stooping down suddenly, he soaked his handkerchief in the stream that glided at his feet, and spread it over his head, under his hat. Drops of water flowed down his temples over his ears, which were always purple, over his massive red neck, and

made their way, one after the other, under his white shirt-collar.

As nobody had appeared, he began tapping with his foot, then he called out: "Hello! Hello!"

A voice at his right answered: "Hello! Hello!"

The doctor appeared under the trees. He was a little thin man, an ex-military surgeon, who passed in the neighborhood for a very skilful practitioner. He limped, having been wounded while in the service, and had to use a stick to assist him in walking. Next came the watchman and the Mayor's secretary, who, having been sent for at the same time, arrived together. They looked frightened, and hurried forward out of breath, walking and running alternately to hasten their progress, and moving their arms up and down so vigorously that they seemed to do more work with them than with their legs.

"You know what the trouble is about?" Renardet said to the doctor.

"Yes, Médéric has found a child dead in the wood."

"That's quite correct. Come on!"

They walked along, side by side, followed by the two other men; their steps made no sound on the moss; their eyes gazed in front of them.

Suddenly the doctor, extending his arm, said: "Look, there she is!"

The doctor hastened his steps, interested by the discovery. As soon as they were near the corpse,

he bent down to examine it without touching it. He had put on his eye-glasses, as one does in examining some curious object, then turned round saying very quietly without rising: "Violated and murdered, as we shall prove presently. This little girl, moreover, is almost a woman—look at her bust."

The doctor lightly drew away the handkerchief covering her face, which looked black, frightful, the tongue protruding, the eyes bloodshot. He continued:

"Good heavens! She was strangled the moment the deed was done."

He felt her neck.

"Yes, strangled with the hands without leaving any trace, neither the mark of nails nor the imprint of fingers. Quite right. It is little Louise Roque, without doubt!"

He replaced the handkerchief carefully.

"There is nothing for me to do. She has been dead for the last hour at least. We must give notice of the matter to the authorities."

Renardet, standing with his hands behind his back, kept staring with a stony look at the little body exposed to view on the grass.

"What a wretch!" he murmured, adding: "We must find the clothes."

The doctor felt the hands, the arms, the legs.

"She had been bathing, no doubt," he said. "They ought to be beside the water."

The Mayor thereupon gave hurried directions:

"Do you, Principe" (this was his secretary), "go and find those clothes for me along the stream. You, Maxime" (this was the watchman), "hurry on toward Roüy-le-Tors, and bring with you the magistrate with the gendarmes. They must be here within an hour. You understand?"

The two men set off at once, and Renardet said to the doctor:

"What miscreant could have done such a deed in this part of the country?"

"Who knows?" the doctor murmured. "Anyone is capable of that. Everyone in particular and nobody in general. No matter, it must be some prowler, some workman out of employment. Since we have become a Republic we meet only this kind of person along the roads."

Both men were Bonapartists.

The Mayor continued:

"Yes, it must have been only a stranger, a passer-by, a tramp without hearth or home."

The doctor added, with the shadow of a smile on his face:

"And without a wife. Having neither a good supper nor a good bed, he became reckless. No one can tell how many men there may be in the world capable of crime at a given moment. Did you know that this little girl had disappeared?"

And with the end of his stick he touched one after another the stiffened fingers of the corpse, resting on them as on the keys of a piano.

"Yes, the mother came last night to look for me about nine o'clock, the child not having come home to supper at seven. We looked for her along the roads up to midnight but did not think of the wood. However, we needed daylight for a thorough search."

"Will you have a cigar?" said the doctor.

"Thank you, I don't care to smoke, this affair affects me so painfully."

They remained standing beside the corpse of the young girl, looking so pale on the dark moss. A large blue fly was walking over the body with lively, jerky movements. The two men watched this wandering speck.

"How pretty it is, a fly on the skin!" the doctor said! "The ladies of the last century had good reason to apply them to their faces. Why has this pretty fashion gone out?"

The Mayor appeared not to hear, plunged as he was in deep thought.

But, suddenly he turned round, surprised by a shrill noise. A woman in a cap and blue apron was running toward them under the trees. It was the mother, La Roque. As soon as she saw Renardet she began to shriek:

"My little girl! Where is my little girl?" so distractedly that she did not glance down at the ground. Suddenly she saw the corpse, stopped short, clasped her hands, and raised both arms while she uttered a piercing, heartrending cry—the cry of

a wounded animal. Then she rushed toward the body, fell on her knees, and snatched away the handkerchief that covered the face. When she saw that frightful countenance, black and distorted, she rose with a shudder, then, sinking to the ground, face downward, she pressed her face against the ground, and uttered terrible, continuous screams on the thick moss.

Her tall, thin frame, with its close-clinging skirts, was palpitating, shaken with spasms. One could see her bony ankles and withered calves covered with coarse blue stockings, twitching horribly; she dug at the soil with her crooked fingers, as if trying to make a hole in which to hide herself.

The doctor, much affected, said, in a low tone: "Poor old woman!"

Renardet felt a strange sensation; then he gave vent to a sort of loud sneeze, and, drawing his handkerchief from his pocket, he began to weep, coughing, sobbing, and blowing his nose noisily. He stammered:

"Damn—damn—damned beast to do this! I would like to see him guillotined."

Principe reappeared with his hands empty.

"I have found nothing, M'sieur le Maire," he murmured, "nothing at all anywhere."

The Mayor, alarmed, replied in a thick voice:

"What is that you could not find?"

"The little girl's clothes."

"Well—well—look again, and find them—or you'll have to answer to me."

The man, knowing that the Mayor would not bear opposition, set forth again with hesitating steps, casting a timid side glance at the corpse.

Distant voices were heard under the trees, a confused sound, the noise of an approaching crowd; for Médéric, in the course of his rounds, had carried the news from door to door. The people of the neighborhood, dazed at first, had gossiped about it in the street, from one threshold to another. Then they gathered in groups. They had talked over, discussed and commented on the event for some minutes, and had now come to see for themselves.

They arrived a little faltering and uneasy through fear of the first impression of such a scene on their minds. When they saw the body they stopped, not daring to advance, and speaking low. Then they grew bolder, went on a few steps, stopped again, advanced once more, and presently formed a circle around the dead girl, her mother, the doctor, and Renardet; they were excited and noisy, and crowded forward at the sudden impact of newcomers. They touched the corpse. Some of them even bent down to feel it with their fingers. The doctor motioned them back. But the Mayor, seizing Dr. Labarbe's stick, flung himself on his townspeople, stammering:

"Get away—clear out—you pack of beasts—clear out!"

In a second the crowd of sightseers had fallen back two hundred meters.

Mother La Roque had risen to a sitting posture and was weeping, with her hands clasped over her face.

The crowd discussed the affair, and young lads' eager eyes curiously scrutinized this nude young form. Renardet perceived this, and, abruptly taking off his waistcoat, he flung it over the little girl, who was entirely hidden from view beneath the large garment.

More spectators drew near quietly. The wood was filled with people, and a continuous hum of voices rose from under the tangled foliage of the tall trees.

The Mayor, in his shirt-sleeves, remained standing, with his stick in his hands, in a fighting attitude. He seemed exasperated by this curiosity on the part of the people, and kept repeating:

"If one of you comes nearer I'll break his head as I would a dog's."

The peasants were greatly afraid of him. They held back. Dr. Labarbe, who was smoking, sat down beside La Roque, and spoke to her in order to distract her attention. The old woman at once removed her hands from her face, and replied with a flood of tearful words, pouring out her grief in copious talk. She told the whole story of her life, her marriage, the death of her man, a cattle-drover, who had been gored to death, the infancy of her daughter, her wretched existence as a widow without resources and with a child to support. She had

only this one, her little Louise, and the child had been killed—killed in this wood. All of a sudden she felt anxious to see her again, and, dragging herself on her knees toward the corpse, she raised one corner of the garment that covered her; then she let it fall again, and began wailing once more. The crowd remained silent, eagerly watching all the mother's movements.

Suddenly there was a great commotion at the cry of "The gendarmes! The gendarmes!"

Two gendarmes appeared in the distance, advancing at a rapid trot, escorting their captain and a little gentleman with red whiskers, who bobbed up and down like a monkey on a big white mare.

The watchman had just found Monsieur Putoin, the magistrate, at the moment when he was mounting his horse to take his daily ride, for he posed as a good horseman, to the great amusement of the officers.

He dismounted, along with the captain, and shook hands with the Mayor and the doctor, casting a ferret-like glance on the linen waistcoat beneath which lay the corpse.

When he was made acquainted with all the facts, he first gave orders to disperse the crowd, whom the gendarmes drove out of the wood, but who soon reappeared in the meadow and formed a deep hedge of excited and moving heads, on the other side of the stream.

The doctor, in his turn, gave explanations, which

Renardet noted in his memorandum book. All the evidence was given, taken down, and commented on without leading to any discovery. Maxime, too, came back without having found any trace of the clothes.

This disappearance surprised everybody; no one could explain it except on the theory of theft, and as her rags were not worth twenty sous even this theory was inadmissible.

The magistrate, the Mayor, the captain, and the doctor set to work searching in pairs, putting aside the smallest branches along the river.

Renardet said to the judge:

"How does it happen that this wretch has concealed or carried away the clothing, and has left the body exposed in sight of everyone?"

The other, crafty and sagacious, answered:

"Ha! Ha! Perhaps a blind? This crime has been committed either by a brute or by a sly scoundrel. In any case, we shall easily succeed in finding him."

The sound of wheels made them turn their heads round. It was the deputy magistrate, the doctor, and the registrar of the court, who had arrived in their turn. They resumed their search, all chatting animatedly.

"You know," said Renardet suddenly, "that you are to take luncheon with me."

Everyone smilingly accepted the invitation, and the magistrate, thinking that the case of little Louise

Roque had occupied enough attention for one day, turned toward the Mayor.

"I can have the body brought to your house, can I not? You have a room in which you can keep it for me till this evening."

The other became confused, and stammered:

"Yes—no—no. To tell the truth, I prefer that it should not come into my house on account of—on account of my servants, who are already talking about ghosts in—in my tower, in the Fox's Tower. You know—I could no longer keep a single maid. No—I prefer not to have it in my house."

The magistrate began to smile.

"Very well! I will have it taken at once to Roüy for the legal examination." Turning to his deputy, he said:

"I may use your trap, may I not?"

"Yes, certainly."

They all returned to the place where the corpse lay. La Roque, now seated beside her daughter, was holding her hand and staring before her with a wandering, listless eye.

The two doctors endeavored to lead her away, so that she might not witness the dead girl's removal; but she understood at once what they intended to do, and, flinging herself on the body, she threw both arms around it. Lying upon the corpse, she exclaimed:

"You shall not have it—it's mine—it's mine now. They have killed her for me, and I want to keep her—you shall not have her——"

All the men, affected and not knowing how to act, remained standing around her. Renardet fell on his knees, and said to her:

"Listen, La Roque, it is necessary, in order to find out who killed her. Without this, we could not find out. We must make a search for the man in order to punish him. When we have found him we will give her up to you. I promise you this."

This explanation bewildered the woman, and a feeling of hatred showed itself in her distracted glance.

"So then they'll arrest him?"

"Yes, I promise you that."

She rose, deciding to let them do as they wished; but when the captain remarked:

"It is surprising that her clothes were not found," a new idea, of which she had not previously thought entered her mind, and she asked:

"Where are her clothes? They are mine. I want them. Where have they been put?"

They explained to her that they had not been found; but she demanded them persistently, crying and moaning:

"They are mine—I want them. Where are they?"

The more they tried to calm her, the more she sobbed and persisted in her demands. She no longer wanted the body, she insisted on having the clothes, as much perhaps through the unconscious cupidity of a wretched being to whom a piece of

silver represents a fortune as through maternal tenderness.

And when the little body, rolled up in blankets, which had been brought out from Renardet's house, had disappeared in the vehicle, the old woman, standing under the trees, sustained by the Mayor and the captain, exclaimed:

"I have nothing, nothing, nothing in the world, not even her little cap—her little cap."

The *curé,* a young priest, had just arrived. He offered to accompany La Roque, and they went away together toward the village. The mother's grief was modified by the soothing words of the clergyman, who promised her a thousand compensations. But she kept repeating: "If I had only her little cap." This idea now dominated every other.

Renardet called from the distance: "You will lunch with us, Monsieur l'Abbé—in an hour's time."

The priest turned his head and replied:

"With pleasure, Monsieur le Maire. I'll be with you at twelve."

They all directed their steps toward the house, whose gray front, with the large tower built on the edge of the Brindille, was seen through the branches.

The meal lasted a long time. They talked about the crime. Everybody was of the same opinion. It had been committed by some tramp passing there by mere chance while the little girl was bathing.

Then the magistrates returned to Roüy, announc-

ing that they would return next day at an early hour. The doctor and the *curé* went to their respective homes, while Renârdet, after a long walk through the fields, returned to the wood, where he remained walking till twilight with slow steps, his hands behind his back.

He went to bed early, and was still asleep next morning when the magistrate entered his room. He was rubbing his hands together with a self-satisfied air.

"Ha! ha! You are still sleeping! Well, my dear fellow, we have news this morning."

The Mayor sat up in his bed.

"What, pray?"

"Oh! Something strange. You remember how the mother clamored yesterday for some memento of her daughter, especially her little cap? Well, on opening her door this morning she found on the threshold her child's two little wooden shoes. This proves that the crime was perpetrated by some one from the district, some one who felt pity for her. Besides, the postman, Médéric, brought me the thimble, the knife, and the needle-case of the dead girl. So the man in carrying off the clothes to hide them must have let fall the things that were in the pocket. As for me, I attach special importance to the wooden shoes, as they indicate a certain moral culture and a sense of tenderness on the part of the assassin. We will, therefore, if you have no objection, go over together the principal inhabitants of your district."

The Mayor rose. He rang for his shaving-water.

"With pleasure, but it will take some time, and we may begin at once," he said.

Monsieur Putoin sat astride a chair.

Renardet covered his chin with a white lather while he looked at himself in the glass; then he sharpened his razor on the strop and continued:

"The principal inhabitants of Carvelin bears the name of Joseph Renardet, Mayor, a rich landowner, a rough man who beats guards and coachmen——"

The examining magistrate burst out laughing.

"That is enough; let us pass on to the next."

"The second in importance is Pelledent, his deputy, a cattle-breeder, an equally rich landowner, a crafty peasant, very sly, very close-fisted on every question of money, but in my opinion incapable of having perpetrated such a crime."

"Go on," said Monsieur Putoin.

Renardet, while proceeding with his toilet, reviewed the characters of all the inhabitants of Carvelin. After two hours' discussion their suspicions were fixed on three men who had hitherto borne bad reputations—a poacher named Cavalle, a fisherman named Paquet, who caught trout and crabs, and a cattle-drover called Clovis.

The search for the perpetrator of the crime lasted all summer, but he was not discovered. Those who were suspected and arrested easily proved their innocence, and the authorities were compelled to abandon the attempt to capture the criminal

But this murder appeared to have moved the entire countryside in a singular manner. In everyone's mind remained a disquietude, a vague fear, a sensation of mysterious terror, springing not merely from the impossibility of discovering any trace of the assassin, but also and above all from that strange finding of the wooden shoes in front of La Roque's door the day after the crime. The certainty that the murderer had assisted at the investigation, that he was still, doubtless, living in the village, possessed all minds and seemed to brood over the neighborhood like a constant menace.

The wood had also become a dreaded spot, a place to be avoided, and supposed to be haunted.

Formerly the inhabitants went there to spend Sunday afternoons. They used to sit down on the moss at the foot of the huge tall trees, or walk along the water's edge watching the trout gliding among the weeds. The boys would play bowls, hide-and-seek, and other games, where the ground had been cleared and leveled, and the girls, in rows of four or five, would trip along, holding one another by the arms and screaming songs with their shrill voices. Now nobody ventured there for fear of finding some corpse lying on the ground.

Autumn arrived, the leaves began to fall from the tall trees, whirling round and round to the ground, and the sky could be seen through the bare branches. Sometimes, when a gust of wind swept over the tree-tops, the slow, continuous rain

suddenly grew heavier, and became a rough storm that covered the moss with a thick yellow carpet that made a squashing sound under the feet.

The Brindille, swollen by the storms, rushed on more quickly, yellow and angry, between its banks, bordered by two thin, bare, willow hedges.

Renardet had suddenly resumed his walks under the trees. Every day, at sunset, he left his house, descended the front steps slowly, and entered the wood in a dreamy fashion, with his hands in his pockets, and paced over the damp soft moss, while a legion of rooks from all the neighboring haunts came thither to rest in the tall trees, and then flew off like a black cloud, uttering loud, discordant cries.

Night came on, and Renardet would still be strolling slowly under the trees; then, when the darkness prevented him from walking any longer, he went back to the house and sank into his arm-chair in front of the glowing hearth.

One morning an important bit of news was circulated through the district; the Mayor was having his whole wood cut down.

Twenty woodcutters were already at work. They had begun at the corner nearer the house, and worked rapidly in the master's presence.

Each day the thicket grew thinner, losing its trees, which fell one by one, as an army loses its soldiers.

Renardet no longer walked to and fro. He remained there from morning till night, contemplating, motionless, with his hands behind his back, the

slow destruction of his wood. When a tree fell he placed his foot on it as if it were a corpse. Then he raised his eyes to the next with a kind of secret, calm impatience, as if he expected, hoped for something at the end of this slaughter.

Meanwhile, they were approaching the place where little Louise Roque had been found. They came to it one evening in the twilight.

As it was dark, the sky being overcast, the woodcutters wanted to stop their work, putting off till next day the fall of an enormous beech-tree; but the Mayor objected to this, and insisted that they should at once cut down this giant, which had sheltered the crime.

When the lopper had laid it bare and the woodcutters had sapped its base, five men began to haul at the rope attached to the top.

The tree resisted; its powerful trunk, although notched to the center, was as rigid as iron. The workmen altogether, with a sort of simultaneous motion, strained at the rope, bending backward and uttering a cry which timed and regulated their efforts.

Two woodcutters standing close to the giant remained with axes in their grip, like two executioners ready to strike once more, and Renardet, motionless, with his hand on the trunk, awaited the fall with an uneasy, nervous feeling.

One of the men said to him:

"You are too near, Monsieur le Maire. When it falls it may hurt you."

He did not reply and did not move away. He seemed ready to catch the beech-tree in his open arms and cast it on the ground like a wrestler.

Suddenly, at the base of the tall column of wood came a rent that seemed to run to the top, like a painful shock; it bent slightly, ready to fall, but still resisting. The men, in a state of excitement, stiffened their arms, renewed their efforts with greater vigor, and, just as the tree came crashing down, Renardet suddenly made a forward step, then stopped, his shoulders raised to receive the irresistible shock, the mortal shock which would crush him to the earth.

But the beech-tree, having swerved a little, only grazed his loins, throwing him on his face, five meters away.

The workmen rushed forward to lift him up. He had already risen to his knees, stupefied, with bewildered eyes and passing his hand across his forehead, as if he were awaking from an attack of madness.

When he had gained his feet once more the men, astonished, questioned him, not being able to understand what he had done. He replied in faltering tones that he had been dazed for a moment, or, rather, he had been thinking of his childhood days; that he thought he would have time to run under the tree, as street boys rush in front of vehicles driving rapidly past; that he had played at danger; that for the past week he had felt this desire grow-

ing stronger within him, and had asked himself each time a tree began to fall whether he could pass beneath it without being touched. It was a piece of stupidity, he confessed; but everyone has these moments of insanity and these temptations to boyish folly.

He made this explanation in a slow tone, searching for his words, and speaking in a colorless tone.

Then he left them, saying:

"Till to-morrow, my friends—till to-morrow."

As soon as he got back to his room he sat down at his table which his lamp lighted up brightly, and, burying his head in his hands, he began to weep.

He remained thus for a long time, then wiping his eyes, raised his head, and looked at the clock. It was not yet six.

"I have time before dinner," he thought.

He went to the door and locked it. He then came back, and, sitting down at his table, pulled out the middle drawer. Taking from it a revolver, he laid it down on his papers in full view. The barrel of the firearm glittered, giving out gleams of light.

Renardet gazed at it for some time with the uneasy glance of a drunken man; then he rose and began to pace up and down the room.

He walked from one end of the apartment to the other, stopping from time to time only to pace up and down again a moment later. Suddenly he opened the door of his dressing-room, steeped a

towel in the water-pitcher and moistened his forehead, as he had done on the morning of the crime.

Then he began pacing to and fro again. Each time he passed the table the gleaming revolver attracted his glance, tempted his hand; but he kept watching the clock, and reflected:

"I have still time."

It struck half-past six. Then he took up the revolver, opened his mouth wide with a frightful grimace, and thrust the barrel into it as if he wanted to swallow it. He remained in this position for some seconds without moving, his finger on the trigger, then, suddenly, seized with a shudder of horror, he dropped the pistol on the carpet.

He fell back on his armchair, sobbing:

"I cannot. I dare not! My God! My God! How can I find courage to kill myself?"

There was a knock at the door. He rose, bewildered. A servant said: "Monsieur's dinner is served."

"All right," he replied. "I'm coming down."

Then he picked up the revolver, locked it again in the drawer, and looked at himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece to see whether his face did not look too much troubled. It was as red as usual, a little redder perhaps. That was all. He went down and seated himself at table.

He ate slowly, like a man who wishes to prolong the meal, who does not want to be alone.

He smoked several pipes in the hall while the

table was being cleared. After that, he went back to his room.

As soon as he had locked himself in he looked under the bed, opened all the closets, explored every corner, rummaged through all the furniture. Then he lighted the candles on the mantelpiece, and, turning round several times, ran his eye all over the apartment with an anguish of terror that distorted his face, for he knew well that he should see her, as he did every night—little Louise Roque, the little girl he had attacked and afterward strangled.

Every night the odious vision came back again. First he seemed to hear a kind of roaring sound, such as is made by a threshing-machine or the distant passage of a train over a bridge. Then he began to gasp, to suffocate, and had to unbutton his collar and his belt. He moved about to make his blood circulate, he tried to read, he attempted to sing. It was in vain. His thoughts, in spite of himself, went back to the day of the murder, and made him begin it over again in all its most secret details, with all the violent emotions he had experienced from the first minute to the last.

He had felt on rising that morning—the morning of the horrible day—a little dizziness and headache, which he attributed to the heat, so that he remained in his room until breakfast time.

After the meal he had taken a siesta, then, toward the close of the afternoon, he had gone out to breathe the fresh, soothing breeze under the trees.

But, as soon as he was outside, the heavy, scorching air of the plain oppressed him still more. The sun, still high in the heavens, poured down on the parched soil waves of burning light. Not a breath of wind stirred the leaves. Every beast and bird, even the grasshoppers, were silent. Renardet reached the tall trees and began to walk over the moss where the Brindille produced a slight freshness of the air beneath the immense roof of branches. But he felt ill at ease. It seemed to him that an unknown, invisible hand was strangling him, and he hardly thought of anything, having usually few ideas in his head. For the last three months only one thought haunted him—the thought of marrying again. He suffered from living alone, suffered from it morally and physically. Accustomed for ten years past to feeling a woman near him, habituated to her presence every moment, he had need, an imperious and perplexing need, of such association. Since Madame Renardet's death he had suffered continually without knowing why; he had suffered at not feeling her dress brushing past him, and, above all, from no longer being able to calm and soothe himself in her arms. He had been hardly six months a widower, and he was already looking about in the district for some young girl or some widow whom he might marry when his period of mourning was at an end.

He had a chaste soul, but it was lodged in a powerful, herculean body, and carnal visions began

to disturb his sleep and his vigils. He drove them away; they came back again; and he murmured ironically from time to time, smiling at himself:

"I am like St. Anthony!"

Having had on this special morning several of these visions, the desire suddenly came into his breast to bathe in the Brindille in order to refresh himself and cool his blood.

He knew of a large deep pool, a little farther down, where the people of the neighborhood came sometimes to take a dip in summer. He went there.

Thick willow-trees hid this clear body of water where the current rested and went to sleep for a while before going on its way again. Renardet, as he appeared, thought he heard a light sound, a faint splashing which was not that of the stream between the banks. He softly put aside the leaves and looked. A little girl, quite naked in the transparent water, was beating the water with both hands, dancing about in it, and dipping herself with pretty movements. She was not a child nor was she yet a woman. She was plump and well developed, while preserving an air of youthful precocity, as of one who had grown rapidly. He no longer moved, overcome with surprise, with desire, holding his breath with a strange, poignant emotion. He remained there, his heart beating as if one of his sensuous dreams had just been realized, as if an impure fairy had conjured up before him this young creature, this little rustic Venus, rising from the

eddies of the stream as the real Venus rose from the waves of the sea.

Suddenly the little girl emerged from the water, and, without seeing him, came over to where he stood, looking for her clothes in order to dress herself. As she approached gingerly, on account of the sharp-pointed stones, he felt himself pushed toward her by an irresistible force, by a mad transport of passion, which bewildered his mind and made him tremble from head to foot.

She remained standing some seconds behind the willow-tree which concealed him from view. Then, losing his reason entirely, he pushed aside the branches, rushed at her, and seized her in his arms. She fell, too terrified to offer any resistance, too terror-stricken to cry out. He seemed possessed, not understanding what he was doing.

He awoke from his crime as one wakes from a nightmare. The child burst out weeping.

"Keep quiet! Hold your tongue!" he said, "I'll give you money."

But she did not listen to him, and went on sobbing.

"Come now, hush, hush! Do hold your tongue! Keep quiet!" he continued.

She kept shrieking as she tried to free herself. He suddenly realized that he was ruined, and he caught her by the neck to stop her mouth from uttering those heartrending, dreadful screams. As she continued to struggle with the desperate

strength of a being who is seeking to fly from death, he pressed his enormous hands on the little throat swollen with screaming, and in a few seconds, so furiously did he grip her, he had strangled her. He had not intended to kill her, but only to make her keep quiet.

Then he stood up overwhelmed with horror. She lay before him, her face bleeding and blackened. He was about to rush away when, in his agitated soul, sprang up the mysterious and undefined instinct that guides all beings in the hour of danger.

He was about to throw the body into the water; but another impulse drove him toward the clothes, which he made into a small package. Then, as he had a piece of twine in his pocket, he tied it up and hid it in a deep portion of the stream, beneath the trunk of a tree that overhung the Brindille.

Then he went away at a rapid pace, reached the meadows, took a wide turn in order to show himself to some peasants who dwelt some distance away at the opposite side of the district, and came back to dine at the usual hour, telling his servants all that was supposed to have happened during his walk.

He slept, however, that night; he slept with a heavy, brutish sleep like the sleep of certain persons condemned to death. He did not open his eyes until the first glimmer of dawn, and he waited till his usual hour for rising, so as to excite no suspicion.

Then he had to be present at the inquiry as to

the cause of death. He had done so like a somnambulist, in a kind of vision which showed him men and things as in a dream, in a cloud of intoxication, with that sense of unreality which perplexes the mind at the time of the greatest catastrophes.

But the agonized cry of Mother Roque pierced his heart. At that moment he had felt inclined to cast himself at the old woman's feet, and to exclaim: "I am the guilty man!"

But he had restrained himself. He went back, however, during the night, to fish up the dead girl's wooden shoes, in order to place them on her mother's threshold.

As long as the inquiry lasted, as long as it was necessary to lead justice astray, he was calm, master of himself, crafty and smiling. He discussed quietly with the magistrates all the suppositions that passed through their minds, combated their opinions, and demolished their arguments. He even took a keen and mournful pleasure in disturbing their investigations, in confusing their ideas, in showing the innocence of those whom they suspected.

But as soon as the inquiry was abandoned he became gradually nervous, more excitable than he had been before, although he mastered his irritability. Sudden noises made him start with fear; he shuddered at the slightest thing, and trembled sometimes from head to foot when a fly alighted on his forehead. Then he was seized with an imperious de-

sire for motion, which impelled him to take long walks and to remain up whole nights pacing up and down his room.

It was not that he was goaded by remorse. His animal-like nature did not lend itself to any shade of sentiment or of moral terror. A man of energy and even of violence, born to make war, to ravage conquered countries and to massacre the vanquished, full of the savage instincts of the hunter and the fighter, he hardly took count of human life. Though he respected the Church outwardly, from policy, he believed in neither God nor the devil, expecting neither chastisement nor recompense in another life for his acts in this life. His sole belief was a vague philosophy drawn from all the ideas of the encyclopedists of the last century, and he regarded religion as a moral sanction of the law, the one and the other having been invented by men to regulate social relations. To kill any one in a duel, or in war, or in a quarrel, or by accident, or for the sake of revenge, or even through bravado, would have seemed to him an amusing and clever thing, and would not have left more impression on his mind than a shot fired at a hare; but he had experienced a profound emotion at the murder of this child. He had, in the first place, perpetrated it in the heat of an irresistible gust of passion, in a sort of tempest of the senses that had overpowered his reason. And he cherished in his heart, in his flesh, on his lips, even to

the very tips of his murderous fingers, a kind of bestial love, as well as a feeling of terrified horror, toward this little girl surprised by him and basely killed. Every moment his thoughts returned to that horrible scene, and, though he tried to drive this picture from his mind, though he put it aside with terror, with disgust, he felt it surging through his soul, moving about in him, waiting incessantly for the moment to reappear.

As evening approached he was afraid of the shadow falling around him. He did not yet know why the darkness seemed frightful to him; but he instinctively feared it, he felt that it was peopled with terrors. The bright daylight did not lend itself to fears. Things and beings were visible then, and only natural things and beings could exhibit themselves in the light of day. But the night, the impenetrable night, thicker than walls, and empty; the infinite night, so black, so vast, in which one might brush against frightful things; the night, when one feels that a mysterious terror is wandering, prowling about, appeared to him to conceal an unknown, threatening danger, close beside him.

What was it?

He knew before long. As he sat in his armchair, rather late one evening when he could not sleep, he thought he saw the curtain of his window move. He waited, uneasily, with throbbing heart. The drapery did not stir; then, suddenly it moved once more. He did not dare to rise; he no longer ven-

tured to breathe, and yet he was brave. He had often fought, and he would have liked to catch thieves in his house.

Was it true that the curtain did move? he asked himself, fearing that his eyes had deceived him. It was, moreover, such a slight thing, a gentle flutter of drapery, a kind of trembling in its folds, less than an undulation caused by the wind.

Renardet sat still, with staring eyes and outstretched neck; he sprang to his feet abruptly, ashamed of his fear, took four steps, seized the drapery with both hands, and pulled it wide apart. At first, he saw nothing but darkened glass, resembling plates of glittering ink. The night, vast and impenetrable, stretched beyond as far as the invisible horizon. He remained standing in front of this illimitable shadow, when suddenly he perceived a moving light, which seemed some distance away.

He put his face close to the window, thinking that a person looking for crabs might be poaching in the Brindille, for it was past midnight, and this light rose at the edge of the stream, under the trees. As he was not yet able to see clearly, Renardet placed his hands over his eyes; and suddenly this light became an illumination, and he beheld little Louise Roque naked and bleeding on the moss. He recoiled, frozen with horror, knocked over his chair, and fell over on his back. He remained there some minutes in anguish of mind; then

he sat up and began to reflect. He had had a hallucination—that was all; a hallucination due to the fact that a night marauder was walking with a lantern in his hand near the water's edge. What was there astonishing, besides, in the circumstance that the recollection of his crime should sometimes bring before him the vision of the dead girl?

He rose from the floor, swallowed a glass of wine, and sat down again. He was thinking:

"What am I to do if this occurs again?"

And it would occur; he felt it; he was sure of it. Already his glance was drawn toward the window; it called him; it attracted him. In order to avoid looking at it, he turned his chair round. Then he took a book and tried to read; but it seemed to him that he presently heard something stirring behind him, and he swung round his armchair on one foot.

The curtain was moving again; unquestionably, it moved this time; he could no longer have any doubt about it.

He rushed forward and grasped it so violently that he pulled it down with its pole. Then he eagerly thrust his face to the glass. He saw nothing. All was black outside; and he breathed with the joy of a man whose life has just been saved.

He went back to his chair and sat down again; but, almost immediately, he felt a longing to look out once more through the window. Since the curtain had fallen down, the window made a sort of gap, fascinating and terrible, on the dark landscape.

In order not to yield to this dangerous temptation, he undressed, blew out the light, and closed his eyes.

Lying on his back motionless, his skin warm and moist, he awaited sleep. Suddenly a great gleam of light flashed across his eyelids. He opened them, believing that his house was on fire. All was black as before, and he leaned on his elbow to try to distinguish the window, which had still for him an unconquerable attraction. By dint of straining his eyes, he could perceive some stars, and he rose, groped his way across the room, discovered the panes with his outstretched hands, and placed his forehead close to them. There below, under the trees, lay the body of the little girl gleaming like phosphorous, illuminating the surrounding darkness.

Renardet uttered a cry and rushed toward his bed, where he lay till morning, his head hidden under the pillow.

From that moment his life became intolerable. He passed his days in apprehension of each succeeding night; and each night the vision returned. As soon as he had locked himself up in his room he strove to resist it; but in vain. An irresistible force lifted him and pushed him against the window, as if to call the phantom, and he saw it at once, lying in the spot where the crime was committed, in the position in which it had been found.

Then the dead girl rose and came toward him with little steps just as the child had done when she came out of the river. She advanced quietly, pass-

ing straight across the grass, and over the bed of withered flowers. Then she rose in the air toward Renardet's window. She came toward him as she had come on the day of the crime. And the man recoiled before the apparition—he retreated to his bed, and sank upon it, knowing well that the little one had entered the room, and that she now was standing behind the curtain, which presently moved. And until daybreak he kept staring at this curtain, with a fixed glance, ever waiting to see his victim depart.

But she did not appear any more; she only remained there behind the curtain, which occasionally quivered tremulously. And Renardet, his fingers clutching the bed-clothes, squeezed them as he had squeezed the throat of little Louise Roque.

He heard the clock striking the hours; and in the stillness the pendulum kept ticking in time with the loud throbbing of his heart. And he suffered, the wretched man, more than any man had ever suffered before.

As soon as a white streak of light on the ceiling announced the approaching dawn, he felt himself free, alone at last, alone in his room; and he went to sleep. He slept several hours—a restless, feverish sleep in which he retraced in dreams the horrible vision of the past night.

When he went down to the late breakfast, he felt exhausted as after unusual exertion, and he ate hardly anything, still haunted as he was by the fear of what he had seen the night before.

He knew well, however, that it was not an apparition, that the dead do not come back, and that his sick soul, his soul possessed by one thought alone, by an indelible remembrance, was the only cause of his torture, was the power that brought the dead girl back to life and raised up her form before his eyes, on which it was ineffaceably imprinted. But he knew, too, that there was no cure, that he never would escape from the savage persecution of his memory; and he resolved to die rather than endure these tortures longer.

He considered how he would kill himself. It must be something simple and natural, which would preclude the idea of suicide. For he clung to his reputation, to the name bequeathed to him by his ancestors; and if his death awakened any suspicion people's thoughts might be, perhaps, directed toward the mysterious crime, toward the murderer who could not be found, and they would not hesitate to accuse him of the crime.

A strange idea came into his head, that of allowing himself to be crushed by the tree at the foot of which he had assassinated little Louise Roque. So he determined to have the wood cut down, and to simulate an accident. But the beech-tree refused to crush his ribs.

Returning to his house, a prey to utter despair, he had snatched up his revolver, and then did not dare to fire it.

The dinner bell summoned him. He could eat

nothing, and he went upstairs again. He did not know what to do. Now that he had evaded the first time, he felt himself a coward. Presently he would be ready, brave, decided, master of his courage and of his resolution; now he was weak and feared death as much as he did the dead girl.

"I dare not venture it again," he faltered; "I dare not venture it."

He glanced with terror, first at the revolver on the table and next at the curtain that hid his window. It seemed to him, moreover, that something horrible would occur as soon as his life was ended. Something? What? A meeting with her, perhaps. She was watching for him; she was waiting for him; she was calling him; and it was in order to seize him in her turn, to draw him toward the doom that would avenge her, and to lead him to die, that she appeared thus every night.

He began to wail like a child, repeating: "I will not venture it again—I will not venture it."

Then he fell on his knees, and murmured:

"My God! my God!" although he did not believe in God. And he no longer dared, in fact, to look at his window, where he knew the apparition was hiding, nor at his table, where his revolver gleamed.

When he had risen, he said:

"This cannot last; there must be an end to it."

The sound of his voice in the silent room made a chill of fear pass through his limbs, but, as he could

not bring himself to come to a determination, as he felt certain that his finger would always refuse to pull the trigger of his revolver, he turned to hide his head under the bedclothes, and began to reflect.

He would have to find some way in which he could force himself to die, to play some trick on himself, which would not allow any hesitation on his part, any delay, any possible regrets. He envied condemned criminals who are led to the scaffold surrounded by soldiers. Oh, if he could only beg someone to shoot him! if, after confessing his crime to a true friend who would never divulge it, he could procure death at his hand!

But from whom could he ask this terrible service? From whom? He thought of all the people he knew. The doctor? No, he would probably talk about it afterward. Suddenly a fantastic idea entered his mind. He would write to the magistrate, who was on terms of close friendship with him, and would denounce himself as the perpetrator of the crime. In this letter he would confess everything, and reveal how his soul had been tortured, how he had resolved to die, how he had hesitated about carrying out his resolution, and what means he had employed to strengthen his failing courage. In the name of their old friendship he would implore of the other to destroy the letter as soon as he had ascertained that the culprit had inflicted justice on himself. Renardet could rely on this magistrate; he knew him to be true, discreet,

incapable of even an idle word. He was one of those men who have an inflexible conscience, governed, directed, regulated by reason alone.

Hardly had he formed this project when a strange feeling of joy took possession of his heart. He was calm now. He would write his letter slowly, at daybreak he would put it in the box nailed to the wall outside of his office; then he would ascend his tower to watch for the postman's arrival; and when the man in the blue blouse had gone away, he would cast himself head foremost on the rocks on which the foundations rested. He would take care to be seen first by the workmen who had cut down his wood. He could climb to the projecting stone which bore the flagstaff displayed on festivals. He would smash this pole with a shake and carry it along with him as he fell.

Who would suspect that it was not an accident? And he would be killed outright, owing to his weight and the height of the tower.

Presently he got out of bed, went over to the table, and began to write. He omitted nothing, not a single detail of the crime, not a single detail of the torments of his heart, and he ended by announcing that he had passed sentence on himself, that he was about to execute the criminal, and begged his friend, his old friend, to be careful that no stain should rest on his memory.

When he had finished his letter he saw that the day had dawned.

He closed, sealed it, and wrote the address; then he descended with light steps, hurried toward the little white box fastened to the outside wall in the corner of the farmhouse, and when he had thrown into it this letter, which made his hand tremble, he came back quickly, drew the bolts of the great door, and climbed up to his tower to wait for the passing of the postman, who was to bear away his death sentence.

He felt self-possessed, now. Freed! Saved!

A cold dry wind, an icy blast, passed across his face. He inhaled it eagerly with open mouth, drinking in its chilling kiss. The sky was red, a wintry red, and all the plain, whitened with frost, glistened under the first rays of the sun, as if it were covered with powdered glass.

Renardet, standing, his head bare, gazed at the vast tract of country before him, the meadows to the left, and to the right the village whose chimneys were beginning to smoke in preparation for the morning meal. At his feet he saw the Brindille flowing amid the rocks, where he would soon be crushed to death. He felt new life on that beautiful frosty morning. The light bathed him, entered his being, like a new-born hope. A thousand recollections assailed him, recollections of similar mornings, of rapid walks on the hard earth which rang beneath his footsteps, of happy days of shooting on the edges of pools where wild ducks sleep. All the good things that he loved, the good things of

existence, rushed to his memory, penetrated him with fresh desires, awakened all the vigorous appetites of his active, powerful body.

And he was about to die? Why? He was about to kill himself stupidly, because he was afraid of a shadow—afraid of nothing? He was still rich and in the prime of life! What folly! All he needed was distraction, absence, a voyage in order to forget.

This night even he had not seen the little girl because his mind was preoccupied and had wandered toward some other subject. Perhaps he would not see her any more? Even if she still haunted him in this house, surely she would not follow him elsewhere! The earth was wide, the future was long.

Why should he die?

His glance traveled across the meadows, and he perceived a blue spot in the path which wound alongside the Brindille. It was Médéric coming to bring letters from the town and to carry away those of the village.

Renardet gave a start, a sensation of pain shot through his breast, and he rushed down the winding staircase to get back his letter, to demand it back from the postman. Little did it matter to him now whether he was seen. He hurried across the grass damp from the light frost of the previous night, and arrived in front of the box in the corner of the farmhouse exactly at the same time as Médéric.

The latter had opened the little wooden door and drew forth the four papers deposited there by the inhabitants of the locality.

"Good morning, Médéric," said Renardet.

"Good morning, Monsieur le Maire."

"I say, Médéric, I threw a letter into the box that I want back again. I came to ask you to give it back to me."

"Very well, Monsieur le Maire—you'll get it."

The postman raised his eyes. He stood petrified at the sight of Renardet's face. The Mayor's cheeks were purple, his eyes were anxious and sunken, with black circles round them, his hair was unbrushed, his beard untrimmed, his cravat unfastened. It was evident that he had not been in bed.

"Are you ill, Monsieur le Maire?" the postman asked.

The other, suddenly comprehending that his appearance must be unusual, lost countenance, and faltered:

"Oh! no—oh! no. Only I jumped out of bed to ask you for this letter. I was asleep. You understand?"

He said in reply:

"What letter?"

"The one you are to give back to me."

Médéric now began to hesitate. The Mayor's attitude did not strike him as natural. There was perhaps a secret in that letter, a political secret. He knew Renardet was not a Republican, and he

knew all about the tricks and chicanery employed at elections.

"To whom is it addressed, this letter of yours?" he asked.

"To Monsieur Putoin, the magistrate—you know, my friend, Monsieur Putoin!"

The postman searched through the papers and found the one asked for. Then he began looking at it, turning it round and round between his fingers, much perplexed, much troubled by the fear of either committing a grave offense or of making an enemy of the Mayor.

Seeing his hesitation, Renardet made a movement for the purpose of seizing the letter and snatching it away from him. This abrupt action convinced Médéric that some important secret was at stake, and made him resolve to do his duty, cost what it may.

So he flung the letter into his bag and fastened it up, with the reply:

"No, I can't, Monsieur le Maire. So long as it is for the magistrate, I can't."

A pang wrung Renardet's heart, and he said:

"Why, you know me well. You are even able to recognize my handwriting. I tell you I want that paper."

"I can't."

"Look here, Médéric, you know that I'm incapable of deceiving you—I tell you I must have it."

"No, I can't."

A tremor of rage passed through Renardet's soul.

"Damn it, take care! You know that I never trifle, and that I could put you out of your place, my good fellow, and without much delay, either. And then, I am the Mayor of the district, after all; and I now command you to give me back that paper."

The postman answered firmly:

"No, I can't, Monsieur le Maire."

Thereupon Renardet, losing his head, caught hold of the postman's arms in order to take away his bag; but, freeing himself by a strong effort, and springing backward, the letter-carrier raised his big holly stick. Without losing his temper, he said emphatically:

"Don't touch me, Monsieur le Maire, or I'll strike. Take care, I'm only doing my duty!"

Feeling that he was lost, Renardet suddenly became humble, gentle, appealing to him like a whimpering child:

"Listen, my friend, give me back that letter, and I'll recompense you—I'll give you money. Stop! Stop! I'll give you a hundred francs, you understand—a hundred francs!"

The postman turned on his heel and pursued his journey.

Renardet followed him, out of breath, stammering:

"Médéric, Médéric, listen! I'll give you a thou-

sand francs, you understand—a thousand francs."

The postman still went on without giving any answer.

Renardet went on:

"I'll make your fortune, you understand—whatever you wish—fifty thousand francs—fifty thousand francs for that letter! What does it matter to you? You won't? Well, a hundred thousand—I say—a hundred thousand francs. Do you understand? A hundred thousand francs—a hundred thousand francs."

The postman turned back, his face hard, his eye severe:

"Enough of this, or else I'll repeat to the magistrate everything you have just said to me."

Renardet stopped abruptly. It was all over. He turned back and rushed toward his house, running like a haunted animal.

Médéric stopped, in his turn, and watched his flight with stupefaction. He saw the Mayor reenter his house, and he waited still, as if something astonishing were about to happen.

In fact, presently the tall form of Renardet appeared on the summit of the Fox's Tower. He ran round the platform like a madman. He seized the flagstaff and shook it furiously without succeeding in breaking it; then suddenly, like a diver, with his two hands before him, he plunged into space.

Médéric rushed forward to his assistance. He

saw the woodcutters going to work and called out to them, telling them an accident had occurred. At the foot of the walls they found a bleeding body, its head crushed on a rock. The Brindille surrounded this rock, and over its clear, calm waters could be seen a long red thread of mingled brains and blood.

A VOICE FROM THE DEEP

ALL the people of Fécamp knew Mother Patin's story. She had certainly been unfortunate with her husband, for in his lifetime he used to thrash her, as wheat is threshed in the barn. He was master of a fishing-bark and had married her because she was pretty, though poor.

Patin was a good sailor, but brutal; he used to frequent Father Auban's inn, where he would usually drink four or five glasses of brandy, on lucky days eight or ten glasses, and even more, according to his mood. The brandy was served to the customers by Father Auban's daughter, a pleasing brunette, who attracted customers to the house only by her pretty face, for no scandal had ever been gossiped about her.

Patin, when he entered the inn, would be content to look at her and compliment her politely and respectfully. After he had had his first glass of brandy he would find her much nicer; at the second he would wink at her; at the third he would

say: "If you were only willing, Mam'zelle Désirée ——" without ever finishing his sentence; at the fourth he would try to hold her by her skirt in order to kiss her; and when he went as high as ten Father Auban brought him whatever more he ordered.

The old innkeeper, who knew all the tricks of the trade, made Désirée walk about among the tables in order to increase the orders for drinks; and Désirée, who was a worthy daughter of Father Auban, flitted among the benches and joked with the men, her lips smiling and her eyes sparkling.

Patin became so accustomed to Désirée's face that he thought of it even while at sea, when throwing out his nets, in storms or in calms, on moonlight or dark nights. He thought of her while holding the tiller in the stern of his boat, while his four companions were slumbering with their heads on their arms. He always saw her, smiling, pouring out the yellow brandy with a peculiar shoulder movement, and then exclaiming as she turned away: "There, now; are you satisfied?"

He saw her so much in his mind's eye that he was overcome by an irresistible desire to marry her; and, not being able to hold out any longer, he asked for her hand.

He was rich, owned his own vessel, his nets, and a little house at the foot of the hill on the Retenue; whereas Father Auban had nothing. The marriage

was therefore eagerly agreed upon and the wedding took place as soon as possible, as both sides were desirous for the affair to be concluded as early as convenient.

Three days after the wedding Patin could no longer understand why he had ever imagined Désirée to be different from other women. What a fool he had been to incumber himself with a penniless creature, who had undoubtedly bewitched him with some drug she had put in his brandy!

He would swear all day long, break his pipe with his teeth, and abuse his crew; after he had used all known terms against everything that came his way, he would rid himself of his remaining anger on the fish and lobsters, which he pulled from the nets and threw into the cars, accompanying them with curses and threats. When he returned home he would find his wife, Father Auban's daughter, within reach of his mouth and hand, and it was not long before he treated her like the lowest creature in the world. As she listened calmly, accustomed to paternal violence, he grew exasperated at her quiet, and one evening he beat her. Then her life at his home became almost unbearable.

For ten years the principal topic of conversation on the Retenue was about the beatings that Patin gave his wife and his manner of cursing at her for the least thing. He could, indeed, swear with a richness of vocabulary in a roundness of tone unequaled by any other man in Fécamp. As soon as

his ship was sighted at the entrance of the harbor, returning from the fishing expedition, every one awaited the first volley he would hurl from the bridge as soon as he perceived his wife's white cap.

Standing near the stern, he would keep his eye fixed on the bow and the sail, and, notwithstanding the difficulty of the narrow passage and the height of the turbulent waves, he would search among the watching women and try to recognize his wife.

As soon as he perceived her, notwithstanding the noise of the wind and waves, he would let loose upon her with such power and volubility that every one would laugh, although they pitied her greatly. When he arrived at the dock he would relieve his mind, while unloading the fish, in such an expressive manner that he attracted around him all the loafers of the neighborhood. The words left his mouth sometimes like shots from a cannon, short and terrible, sometimes like peals of thunder, which roll and rumble for five minutes, such a hurricane of oaths that he seemed to have in his lungs one of the storms of the Eternal Father.

When he left his ship and found himself face to face with her, surrounded by all the gossips of the neighborhood, he would bring up a new cargo of insults, and take her back to their dwelling, she in front, he behind her, she weeping, he shrieking.

When alone with her behind closed doors, he would thrash her on the slightest pretext. The least thing was sufficient to make him raise his

hand, and when he had once begun he did not stop, but he would throw into her face the true motive for his anger. At each blow he would shriek: "There, you beggar! There, you wretch! There, you pauper! What a bright thing I did when I rinsed my mouth with your rascal of a father's apology for brandy!"

The poor woman lived in continual fear, in a ceaseless trembling of body and soul, in everlasting expectation of outrageous thrashings.

This state of things lasted ten years. She was so timorous that she would grow pale whenever she spoke to any one, and she thought of nothing but the blows with which she was threatened; and she became thinner, more yellow, and drier than a smoked herring.

One night, when her husband was at sea, she was suddenly awakened by the wild roaring of the wind. She sat up in her bed, trembling, but, as she heard nothing more, she lay down again; almost immediately there was a roar in the chimney which shook the entire house; it seemed to cross the heavens like a pack of furious animals snorting and bellowing.

She arose and rushed to the harbor. Other women were arriving from all sides, carrying lanterns. The men also were gathering, and all were watching the foaming crests of the breaking waves.

The storm lasted fifteen hours. Eleven sailors never returned; Patin was among them.

In the neighborhood of Dieppe the wreck of his

bark, the *Jeune-Amélie,* was found. The bodies of his sailors were found near Saint-Valéry, but his never was discovered. As his vessel appeared to have been cut in two, his wife expected and feared his return for a long time; for if there had been a collision he alone might have been picked up and carried afar off.

Little by little she grew accustomed to the thought that she was rid of him, although she would start every time a neighbor, a beggar, or a peddler entered the house suddenly.

One afternoon, about four years after the disappearance of her husband, while she was walking along the Rue aux Juifs, she stopped before the house of an old sea-captain who had recently died, and whose furniture was for sale. At that moment a parrot was at auction; he had green feathers and a blue head, and was watching everybody with a displeased look. "Three francs!" cried the auctioneer. "A bird that can talk like a lawyer, three francs!"

A friend of Madame Patin nudged her and said: "You ought to buy that, you who are rich. It would be good company for you; that bird is worth more than thirty francs. Anyhow, you can always sell it for twenty or twenty-five!"

Patin's widow added fifty centimes, and the bird was given her in a little cage, which she carried away. She took it home, and, as she was opening the wire door in order to give it something to

drink, she received a nip on her finger which opened the skin and drew blood.

"Oh, how naughty he is;" she said.

Nevertheless, she gave it some hemp-seed and maize and watched it smooth out its plumes in the new home with its new mistress.

On the following morning, just as day was breaking, Madame Patin distinctly heard a loud, deep, roaring voice calling: "Are you going to get up, carrion?"

Her fear was so great that she hid her head under the sheets, for when Patin was with her as soon as he would open his eyes he would shout those well-known words into her ears.

Trembling, rolled into a ball, her back prepared for the thrashing which she expected, her face buried in the pillows, she murmured: "Good Lord! He is here! Good Lord! He is here! Good Lord! He has come back!"

Minutes passed; no noise disturbed the quiet room. Trembling, she popped her head out of the bed, sure that he was there, watching, ready to beat her. Except for a ray of sun shining through the window, she saw nothing, and she said to herself: "He must be hiding."

She waited a long time, then, when she grew a little more assured, she said to herself: "I must have dreamed it, seeing that nobody is here."

A little reassured, she closed her eyes, when from quite near a furious voice, the thunderous voice of

the drowned man, could be heard crying: "Hello! when in the name of all that's holy are you going to get up, you devil?"

She jumped out of bed, moved by obedience, by the obedient passion of a woman accustomed to blows, and who still remembers and always will remember the tyrant's voice! "Here I am, Patin," she said, "what do you want?"

But Patin did not answer. Then, at a complete loss, she looked about, and at last she slipped down into a chair, wild with anxiety, convinced that Patin's soul, alone, was near there, near her, and that he had returned in order to torture her.

Suddenly she remembered the loft, in order to reach which one had to take a ladder. Surely he must have hidden there to surprise her. He must have been held by savages, on some distant shore, unable to escape them until now, and he had returned, worse than ever. There was no doubting the quality of that voice. She raised her head and asked: "Are you up there, Patin?"

Patin did not answer. Then, with a terrible fear which made her heart tremble, she climbed the ladder, opened the skylight, looked, saw nothing, entered, looked about, and found nothing. Sitting on some straw, she began to cry; but while she was weeping, overcome by a poignant and supernatural terror, she heard Patin talking in the room below. He seemed less angry, and he was saying: "Nasty weather! Fierce wind! I haven't eaten, by Jove!"

She cried through the ceiling: "Here I am, Patin; I am getting your breakfast ready. Don't be angry."

She ran down again. No one was in the room. She felt herself growing weak, as if death were touching her, and she tried to run for help from the neighbors, when a voice near her cried out: "I haven't had my breakfast, by G——!"

The parrot in his cage was watching her with his round, sly, bad eye. She, too, looked at him wildly, murmuring: "Ah! So it was you!"

He shook his head and continued: "Just you wait! I'll teach you how to be lazy."

What happened within her? She felt, she understood that it was he, the Dead Man, who was returning, who had hidden in the feathers of this bird in order to continue to torment her; that he would curse, as formerly, all day long, and bite and swear at her, in order to attract the neighbors and make them laugh. She rushed for the cage and seized the bird, which scratched and tore her flesh with its claws and beak. But she held it with all her strength between her hands; she threw it on the ground and rolled over it with the frenzy of one possessed. She crushed it, and finally made of it nothing but a little green, flabby lump which no longer moved nor spoke. Then she wrapped it in a cloth, as in a shroud, and she went out in her night-gown, barefoot; she crossed the dock, against which the choppy waves of the sea were beating, and she

shook the cloth and let drop this little dead thing, which looked like a handful of grass. Then she returned, threw herself on her knees before the empty cage, and, overcome by what she had done, kneeled and prayed for forgiveness, as if she had committed some heinous crime.

THE FATHER

THE young man was a clerk in the Bureau of Public Education, and lived at Batignolles. He took the omnibus to Paris every morning, and always sat opposite a certain young girl, with whom he fell in love.

She was employed in a shop, and went in at the same time every day. She was a little brunette, one of those girls whose eyes are so dark that they look like black spots on a complexion like ivory. He always saw her coming at the corner of the same street, and usually she had to run to overtake the heavy vehicle, and sprang upon the steps before the horses had quite stopped. Then she got inside, out of breath, and, sitting down, looked round her.

The first time that he saw her, François Tessier liked her face. One sometimes meets a woman whom one longs to clasp in one's arms without even knowing her. This girl seemed to respond to some chord in his being, to that sort of ideal of love which one cherishes in the depths of the heart, without knowing it.

He looked at her intently, not meaning to be rude, and she became embarrassed, and blushed. He noticed it, and tried to turn away his eyes; but involuntarily he fixed them upon her again every moment, although he tried to look in another direction; and, in a few days, they seemed to know each other without having spoken. He gave up his place to her when the omnibus was full, and went outside, though he was very sorry to do it. By this time, she had grown so bold as to greet him with a little smile; and, although she always lowered her eyes under his looks, which she felt were too ardent, yet she did not appear offended at being looked at in such a manner.

They ended by speaking. A kind of rapid friendship had become established between them, a daily freemasonry of half an hour, and that was certainly one of the most charming half hours in his life. He thought of her all the rest of the day, saw her image continually during the long office hours. He was haunted and bewitched by that fleeting and yet tenacious recollection which the form of a beloved woman leaves in us, and it seemed to him that if he could win that little person it would be maddening happiness to him, almost above human realization.

Every morning she now shook hands with him, and he treasured the sense of that touch and the recollection of the gentle pressure of her little fingers until the next day, and almost fancied that

he preserved the imprint on his palm. He anxiously waited for this short omnibus ride, while Sundays seemed to him heartbreaking days. However, there was no doubt that she loved him at last, for one Saturday, in spring, she promised to go and lunch with him at Maisons-Laffitte the next day.

She was at the railway station first, which surprised him, but she said: "Before going, I want to speak to you. We have twenty minutes to wait and that is more than I shall take for what I have to say."

She trembled as she hung on his arm, and looked down, her cheeks pale, as she continued: "I do not want you to be deceived in me, and I shall not go there with you, unless you promise, unless you swear—not to do—not to do anything—that is at all incorrect."

She had suddenly become as red as a poppy, and said no more. He did not know what to reply, for he was happy and disappointed at the same time. He should love her less, certainly, if he knew that her conduct was light, but then it would be so charming, so delicious to have a little flirtation.

As he did not reply, she began to speak again in an agitated voice, and with tears in her eyes. "If you do not promise to respect me altogether, I shall return home." He pressed her arm tenderly and replied: "I promise; you shall do only what you like." She appeared relieved in mind, and

asked, with a smile: "Do you really mean it?" He looked into her eyes, and replied: "I swear it." "Now you may get the tickets," she said.

During the journey, they could speak little, as the carriage was full, and when they reached Maisons-Laffitte they went toward the Seine. The sun, which shone full on the river, on the leaves and the grass, seemed to be reflected in their hearts, and they went, hand in hand, along the bank, looking at the shoals of little fish swimming near the bank. They walked on, brimming over with happiness, as if they were treading on air.

At last she said: "How foolish you must think me!"

"Why?" he asked.

"To come out like this, all alone with you."

"Certainly not; it is quite natural."

"No, no; it is not natural for me—because I do not wish to commit a fault, and yet this is how girls fall. But if you only knew how wretched it is, every day the same thing, every day in the month, and every month in the year. I live quite alone with mamma, and as she has had a great deal of trouble, she is not very cheerful. I do the best I can, and try to laugh in spite of everything, but I do not always succeed. All the same, it was wrong in me to come, though you, at any rate, will not be sorry."

By way of answer, he kissed her ardently on the ear that was nearest him, but she moved from

him with an abrupt movement, and, growing suddenly angry, exclaimed: "Oh, Monsieur François, after what you swore to me!" And they went back to Maisons-Laffitte.

They had lunch at the Petit-Havre, a little low-roofed house, buried under four enormous poplar trees, beside the river. The air, the heat, the weak white wine, and the sensation of being so close together made them silent; their faces were flushed, and they had a feeling of oppression; but after the coffee they regained their high spirits, and, having crossed the Seine, set off along the bank, toward the village of La Frette. Suddenly he asked: "What is your name?"

"Louise."

"Louise," he repeated, and said nothing more.

The girl picked daisies, and made them into a great bunch, while he sang vigorously, as unrestrained as a colt that has been turned into a meadow. On their left, a vine-covered slope followed the river. François stopped, motionless with astonishment. "Oh, look there!" he said.

The vines had come to an end, and the whole slope was covered with lilac bushes in flower. It was a purple wood! A great carpet of flowers seemed to be stretched over the earth, reaching as far as the village, more than two miles distant. She too stood surprised and delighted, and murmured: "Oh, how pretty!" Crossing a meadow, they ran toward that curious low hill, which, every year,

furnishes all the lilac that is drawn through Paris on the carts of the flower-vendors.

There was a narrow path beneath the trees, so they took it, and when they came to a small clearing, they sat down.

Swarms of flies buzzed around them, making a continuous, gentle sound, and the sun, the bright sun of a perfectly still day, shone over the green slopes, and from that forest of blossoms a powerful fragrance was borne toward them, a breath of perfume, the breath of the flowers.

A church clock struck in the distance, and they embraced gently, then, without the knowledge of anything but that kiss, they reclined on the grass. But Louise soon came to herself with the realization of a great misfortune, and began to cry and sob with grief, with her face buried in her hands.

He tried to console her, but she wanted to go home immediately; and she kept saying, as she walked along quickly: "Good heavens! good heavens!" He said to her: "Louise! Louise! Please let us stop here." But now her cheeks were red, and her eyes hollow, and, as soon as they reached the railway station in Paris, she left him, without even saying good-by.

When he met her in the omnibus the next day, she appeared to him to be changed and thinner, and she said to him: "I want to speak to you; we will get down at the Boulevard."

As soon as they were on the pavement, she said:

"We must bid each other good-by; I cannot meet you again."

"But why?" he asked.

"Because I cannot; I have been guilty, and I will not be so again."

He implored her, tortured by his love; but she replied firmly: "No, I cannot, I cannot." But he only grew all the more excited, and promised to marry her, but again she said: "No," and left him.

For a week he did not see her. He could not manage to meet her, and, as he did not know her address, he thought that he had lost her altogether. On the ninth day, however, there was a ring at his bell, and when he opened the door, she was there. She threw herself into his arms, and did not resist any longer, and for three months they were close friends. He was beginning to grow tired of her, when she whispered something to him; and then he had one idea and wish: to break with her at any price. As he could not do that, not knowing how to begin, or what to say, full of anxiety through fear of the consequences of his rash indiscretion, he took a decisive step: one night he changed his lodgings and disappeared.

The blow was so heavy that she did not look for the man who had abandoned her, but threw herself at her mother's knees, and confessed her misfortune; and, some months after, she gave birth to a boy.

Years passed, and François Tessier grew old,

without any alteration having come into his life. He led the dull, monotonous life of an office clerk, without hope and without expectation. Every day he rose at the same time, went through the same streets, entered the same door, passed the same porter, went into the same office, sat in the same chair, and did the same work. He was alone in the world, alone during the day in the midst of his different colleagues, and alone at night in his bachelor's lodgings; and he laid by a hundred francs a month, against old age.

Every Sunday he went to the Champs-Elysées, to watch the elegant people, the carriages, and the pretty women; and the next day he used to say to one of his colleagues: "The return of the carriages from the Bois du Boulogne was very brilliant yesterday." One fine Sunday morning, however, he went into the Parc Monceau, where the mothers and nurses, sitting alongside of the walks, watched the children playing, and suddenly François Tessier started. A woman passed by, holding two children by the hand, a little boy of about ten and a little girl of four. It was she!

He walked another hundred yards, and then fell into a chair, choking with emotion. She had not recognized him, and so he came back, wishing to see her again. She was sitting now, and the boy was standing by her side very quietly, while the little girl was making sand castles. It was she, it was certainly she, but she had the reserved appearance

of a lady, was dressed simply, and looked self-possessed and dignified. He looked at her from a distance, for he did not venture to approach; but the little boy raised his head, and François Tessier felt himself tremble. It was his own son, there could be no doubt of that! As he looked at him, he thought he could recognize himself as he appeared in an old photograph taken years ago. He remained hidden behind a tree, waiting for her to go, that he might follow her.

He did not sleep that night. The idea of the child especially harassed him. His son! Oh! If he could only have known, have been sure! But what could he have done? However, he went to the house where she had lived, and asked about her. He was told that a neighbor, an honorable man of strict morals, had been touched by her distress, and had married her; he knew the fault she had committed and had married her, and had even recognized the child—his, François Tessier's child—as his own!

Tessier returned to the Parc Monceau every Sunday, for then he always saw her, and each time he was seized with a mad, irresistible longing to take his son into his arms, cover him with kisses, and to steal him, to carry him off.

He suffered horribly in his wretched isolation as an old bachelor, with nobody to care for him, and he also suffered atrocious mental torture, torn by paternal tenderness springing from remorse, long-

ing, and jealousy, and from that need of loving one's own children which nature has implanted in all. At last, he determined to make a despairing attempt, and, going up to her, as she entered the park, he said, standing in the middle of the path, pale and with trembling lips: "You do not recognize me." She raised her eyes, looked at him, uttered an exclamation of horror, of terror, and, taking the two children by the hand, she rushed away, dragging them after her, while he went home and wept inconsolably.

Months passed without his seeing her again, but he suffered, day and night, for he was a prey to paternal love. He would gladly have died if he could only have kissed his son; he would have committed murder, performed any task, braved any danger, ventured anything. He wrote to her, but she did not reply, and, after writing her about twenty letters, he saw that there was no hope of altering her determination, and then he formed the desperate resolution of writing to her husband, being quite prepared to receive a bullet from a revolver, if need be. His letter only consisted of a few lines, as follows:

"MONSIEUR: You must have a perfect horror of my name, but I am so wretched, so overcome by misery, that my only hope is in you, and, therefore, I venture to request you to grant me an interview of only five minutes.

"I have the honor, etc."

The next day he received the reply:

"MONSIEUR: I shall expect you to-morrow, Tuesday, at five o'clock."

As he went up the staircase, François Tessier's heart beat so violently that he had to stop several times. There was a dull and violent thumping noise in his breast, as of some animal galloping; and he could breathe only with difficulty, and had to grasp the banisters, in order not to fall.

He rang the bell on the third floor, and when a maid servant had opened the door, he asked: "Does Monsieur Flamel live here?" "Yes, Monsieur. Please come in."

He was shown into the drawing-room; he was alone, and waited, feeling bewildered, as in the midst of a catastrophe, until a door opened, and a man came in. He was tall, serious, and rather stout, and wore a black frock coat; he pointed to a chair. François Tessier sat down, and then said, with choking breath: "Monsieur—Monsieur—I do not know whether you know my name—whether you know——"

Monsieur Flamel interrupted him. "You need not tell me, Monsieur, I know it. My wife has spoken to me about you." He spoke in the dignified tone of voice of a good man who wishes to be severe, and with the commonplace stateliness of an honorable man, and François Tessier continued:

"Well, Monsieur, I want to say this: I am dying of grief, of remorse, of shame, and I would like once, only once to kiss—the child."

Monsieur Flamel got up and rang the bell, and, when the servant came in, he said: "Will you bring Louis here." When she had gone out, they remained face to face, without speaking, as they had nothing more to say to each other, and waited. Suddenly a little boy of ten rushed into the room, and ran up to the man whom he believed to be his father; but he stopped when he saw the stranger, and Monsieur Flamel kissed him, and said: "Now, go and kiss that gentleman, my dear." The child went up to the stranger and looked at him.

François Tessier had risen. He let his hat fall, and was ready to fall himself as he looked at his son, while Monsieur Flamel had turned away, from a feeling of delicacy, and was looking out of the window.

The child waited in surprise, but he picked up the hat and gave it to the stranger. Then François taking the child up in his arms, began to kiss him wildly all over his face; on his eyes, his cheeks, his mouth, his hair; and the youngster, frightened at the shower of kisses, tried to avoid them, turned away his head, and pushed away the man's face with his little hands. But suddenly François Tessier put him down, and cried: "Good-by! Good-by!" Then he rushed out of the room as if he had been a thief.

MAGNETISM

IT was a men's dinner party, and over the cigars and brandy they were discussing magnetism, Donato's tricks and Charcot's experiments. Presently the skeptical, easy-going men, who cared nothing for religion of any sort, began telling stories of strange occurrences, incredible things which, nevertheless, had really occurred, so they said, falling back into superstitious beliefs, clinging to these remnants of the marvelous, becoming devotees of this mystery of magnetism, defending it in the name of science. There was only one person who smiled, a vigorous young fellow, a great ladies' man, who was so incredulous that he would not even enter upon a discussion of such matters.

He repeated with a sneer:

"Humbug! humbug! humbug! We need not discuss Donato, who is merely a very smart juggler. As for Monsieur Charcot, who is said to be a great man of science, he produces on me the effect of those story-tellers of the school of Edgar Poe, who end by going mad from constantly reflect-

ing on queer cases of insanity. He has authenticated some cases of unexplained and inexplicable nervous phenomena; he makes his way into that unknown region which men are exploring every day, and unable always to understand what he sees, he recalls, perhaps, the ecclesiastical interpretation of these mysteries. I should like to hear what he says himself."

The words of the unbeliever were listened to with a kind of pity, as if he had blasphemed in an assembly of monks.

One of the gentlemen exclaimed:

"And yet miracles were performed in olden times."

"I deny it," replied the other. "Why cannot they be performed now?"

Then each mentioned some fact, some fantastic presentiment, some instance of souls communicating with each other across space, or some case of the secret influence of one being over another. They asserted and maintained that these things had actually occurred, while the skeptic repeated:

"Humbug! humbug! humbug!"

At last he rose, threw away his cigar, and with his hands in his pockets, said: "Well, I also have two stories to tell you, which I will afterward explain. Here they are:

"In a little village of Etretat, the men, who are seafaring folks, go every year to Newfoundland to fish for cod. One night the little son of one

of these fishermen woke up with a start, crying out that his father was dead. The child was quieted, and again he woke up exclaiming that his father was drowned. A month later the news came that his father had, in fact, been swept off the deck of his smack by a billow. The widow then remembered how her son had waked up and spoken of his father's death. Every one said it was a miracle, and the affair caused a great sensation. The dates were compared, and it was found that the accident and the dream were almost coincident, from which they concluded that they had happened on the same night and at the same hour. And there is a mystery of magnetism."

The story-teller stopped suddenly.

Thereupon, one gentleman, much affected by the narrative, asked:

"And can you explain this?"

"Perfectly, Monsieur. I have discovered the secret. The circumstance surprised me and even perplexed me very much; but, you see, I do not believe, on principle. Just as others begin by believing, I begin by doubting; and when I cannot understand, I continue to deny that there can be any telepathic communication between souls, certain that my own intelligence will be able to explain it. Well, I kept on inquiring into the matter, and by dint of questioning all the wives of the absent seamen, I was convinced that not a week passed without one of them or one of their children dream-

ing and declaring when they woke up that the father was drowned. The horrible and continual fear of this accident makes them always talk about it. Now, if one of these frequent predictions coincides, by a very simple chance, with the death of the person referred to, people at once declare it a miracle; for they suddenly lose sight of all the other predictions of misfortune that have remained unfulfilled. I have myself known fifty cases where the persons who made the prediction forgot all about it a week afterward. But, if the man happened to die, then the recollection of the thing is immediately revived, and people are ready to believe in the intervention of God, according to some, and magnetism, according to others."

One of the smokers remarked:

"What you say is right enough; but what about your second story?"

"Oh! my second story is a very delicate matter to relate. It happened to myself, and so I don't place any great value on my own view of the matter. An interested person can never give an impartial opinion. However, here it is:

"Among my acquaintances was a young woman on whom I never had bestowed a thought, whom I never had even looked at attentively, never taken any notice of.

"I classed her among the women of no importance, though she was not bad-looking; she appeared, in fact, to possess eyes, a nose, a mouth,

some sort of hair—just a colorless type of countenance. She was one of those beings who awaken only a chance, passing thought.

"One night, as I was writing letters by my fireside, I was conscious, in the midst of that train of sensuous visions that sometimes passes through one's brain in moments of idle reverie, of a kind of light breath passing through me, a little flutter of the heart, and immediately, without any cause, without any logical connection of thought, I saw distinctly, as if I were touching her, saw from head to foot, and disrobed, this young woman to whom I never had given more than three seconds' thought at a time. I suddenly discovered in her qualities which I never before had observed, a sweet charm, a languorous fascination; she awakened in me that sort of restless emotion that causes one to pursue a woman. But I did not think of her long. I went to bed and was soon asleep. And I dreamed.

"You have all had those strange dreams which make you overcome the impossible, which open to you double-locked doors, unexpected joys, tightly folded arms? Which of us in these troubled, exciting, breathless slumbers has not held, clasped, embraced with rapture, the woman who occupied his thoughts? And have you ever noticed what superhuman delight these happy dreams give us? Into what mad intoxication they cast you! with what passionate spasms they shake you! and with what infinite, caressing, penetrating tenderness they fill

your heart for her whom you hold in your arms in that adorable illusion that is so like reality!

"All this I felt with unforgettable violence. This woman was mine, so much mine that the pleasant warmth of her body remained in my fingers, the odor of her skin in my brain, the taste of her kisses on my lips, the sound of her voice lingered in my ears, the touch of her clasp still clung to me, and the burning charm of her tenderness still gratified my senses long after the disillusion of my awakening.

"And three times that night I had the same dream.

"When day dawned she haunted me, possessed me, filled my senses to such an extent that every second I thought of her.

"At last, I dressed myself and went to call on her. As I went upstairs to her apartment, I was so overcome by emotion that I trembled, and my heart beat rapidly.

"I entered the apartment. She rose the moment she heard my name, and suddenly our eyes met in a peculiar fixed gaze.

"I sat down. I stammered out some commonplaces, which she seemed not to hear. I did not know what to say or do. Then, abruptly, I threw my arms round her, and my dream was realized so suddenly that I began to doubt whether I was really awake. We were friends after this for two years."

"What conclusion do you draw from it?" said a voice.

"The conclusion I draw from it—well, by Jove, the conclusion is that it was just a coincidence! And then—who can tell? Perhaps it was some glance of hers which I had not noticed and which came back that night to me through one of those mysterious and unconscious recollections that often bring before us things ignored by our own consciousness, unperceived by our minds!"

"Whatever you like to call it," said one of his companions, "if you don't believe in magnetism after that, my dear boy, you are an ungrateful fellow!"

THE WRONG HOUSE

QUARTERMASTER VARAJOU had obtained a week's leave to visit his sister, Madame Padoie. Varajou, who was in garrison at Rennes and was leading a very lively existence, finding himself short of money, wrote to his sister saying that he could devote a week to her. It was not that he cared particularly for Madame Padoie, a little moralist, a devotee, and always bad-tempered; but he needed money very much, and he remembered that of all his relatives the Padoies were the only ones whom he had never approached on the subject of money.

The elder Varajou, formerly a horticulturist at Angers but now retired from business, had closed his purse to his scapegrace son and had hardly seen him for two years. His daughter had married Padoie, a former Treasury clerk, who had just been appointed tax-collector at Vannes.

On leaving the train, Varajou found someone to direct him to the house of his brother-in-law, whom he found in his office arguing with the Breton peasants of the neighborhood. Padoie rose from

his seat, held out his hand across the table littered with papers, murmured: "Take a chair; I shall soon be at liberty," sat down again, and resumed his discussion.

The peasants did not understand his explanations and the collector did not understand their argument. He spoke French, they spoke Breton, and the clerk who acted as interpreter appeared not to understand either.

The talk lasted a long time. Varajou looked at his brother-in-law and thought: "What a fool!" Padoie must have been almost fifty. He was tall, thin, bony, slow, bearded, with heavy arched eyebrows. He wore a velvet skull-cap with a gold cord. His look was gentle, like his actions. His speech, gestures, and thought were moderate. Varajou repeated: "What a fool!"

He himself was one of those noisy roysterers for whom the greatest pleasures in life are the café and the society of abandoned women. He understood nothing outside of these conditions of existence.

A noisy braggart, filled with contempt for the rest of the world, from the height of his ignorance he despised the entire universe. When he said: "*Nom d'un chien,* what a holiday!" he expressed the highest degree of admiration of which his mind was capable.

Having finally got rid of his peasants, Padoie inquired: "How are you?"

"Quite well, as you see. And how are you?"

"Quite well, thank you. It is very kind of you to have thought of coming to see us."

"Oh, I have been thinking of it for some time; but you know in the military profession one has not much freedom."

"Yes, I know, I know. All the same it is very kind of you."

"My sister Josephine, is she well?"

"Yes, yes, thank you; you will see her presently."

"Where is she?"

"She is making some calls. We have a great many friends here; it is a very fine town."

"I thought so."

The door opened and Madame Padoie appeared. She went over to her brother without any eagerness, held out her cheek for him to kiss, and asked:

"Have you been here long?"

"No, hardly half an hour."

"Oh, I thought the train would be late. Will you come into the drawing-room?"

They went into the next room, leaving Padoie to his accounts and his taxpayers. As soon as they were alone she said:

"I have heard fine things about you!"

"What have you heard?"

"It seems that you are behaving like a blackguard, getting drunk and running into debt."

Varajou appeared very much astonished.

"I! Never in the world!"

"Oh, do not deny it; I know it."

He attempted to defend himself, but she gave him such a lecture that he could say nothing more.

She then resumed:

"We dine at six o'clock and you may amuse yourself until then. I cannot entertain you, as I have many things to do."

When Varajou was left alone he hesitated as to whether he should sleep or take a walk. He looked first at the door leading to his room and then at the hall door, and decided to go out. He sauntered slowly through the quiet Breton town, so sleepy, so calm, so dead, on the shores of its inland lake, that is called "Le Morbihan." He looked at the little gray houses, the occasional pedestrians, the empty shops, and murmured:

"Vannes is certainly not gay, not lively. It was a bad idea, my coming here."

He reached the desolate harbor, walked back along a lonely, deserted boulevard, and reached home before five o'clock. Then he threw himself on his bed to sleep till dinner-time.

The maid woke him, knocking at the door.

"Dinner is served, Monsieur."

He went downstairs. In the damp dining-room, with the paper peeling from the walls near the floor, he saw a soup-tureen on a round table without any tablecloth, on which were also three melancholy soup-plates.

Monsieur and Madame Padoie entered the room at the same time as Varajou. They all sat down to table, and husband and wife crossed themselves over the pit of the stomach, after which Padoie helped the soup, a meat soup. It was the day for pot roast.

After the soup they had the beef, which was cooked to rags, melted, greasy, like pap. The officer ate slowly, with disgust, weariness, and rage.

Madame Padoie said to her husband:

"Are you going to the Judge's house this evening?"

"Yes, dear."

"Do not stay late. You always get so tired when you go out. You are not made for society, with your feeble health."

She then talked about society in Vannes, of the excellent social circle in which the Padoies moved, thanks to their religious sentiments.

A *purée* of potatoes and a dish of pork were next served, in honor of the guest. Then some cheese, and that was all. No coffee.

When Varajou saw that he would have to spend the evening *tête-à-tête* with his sister, to endure her reproaches and listen to her sermons, without even a glass of liqueur to help him swallow these remonstrances, he felt that he could not bear the torture and declared that he was obliged to go to the police station to have something attended to regarding his leave of absence. He made his escape at seven o'clock.

He had hardly reached the street before he gave himself a shake, like a dog coming out of the water.

"Great heavens!" he muttered; "what a galley slave's life!"

He set out to look for a café, the best in the town. He found it in a public square, behind two gas lamps. Inside the café five or six men, semi-gentlemen and not noisy, were drinking and chatting quietly, leaning their elbows on the small tables, while two billiard-players walked round the green baize where the balls were hitting each other as they rolled.

He heard them counting:

"Eighteen—nineteen! No luck. Oh, that's a good stroke! Well played! Eleven. You should have played on the red. Twenty. Frozen! Frozen! Twelve. Ha! Wasn't I right?"

Varajou ordered:

"A *demi-tasse* and a small decanter of brandy, the best." Then he sat down and waited for it.

He was accustomed to spending his evenings off duty with his companions amid noise and the smoke of pipes. This silence, this quiet, exasperated him. He began to drink, first the coffee, then the brandy, and asked for another decanter. He now wanted to laugh, to shout, to sing, to fight someone. He said to himself:

"Ah! I am half intoxicated. I must go and have a good time."

And he thought he would look for some girls to amuse him. He called the waiter:

"Oh, waiter!"

"Yes, Monsieur!"

"Tell me, where does one amuse oneself here?" The man looked stupid, and replied:

"I do not know, Monsieur. Here, I suppose!"

"How do you mean, here? What do *you* call amusing oneself? "

"I do not know, Monsieur—drinking good beer or good wine."

"Oh, nonsense, stupid! How about the girls?"

"The girls? Ha! ha!"

"Yes, the girls—where can one find any here?"

"Girls?"

"Yes, yes, girls!"

The boy approached, and, lowering his voice, said:

"You want to know where they live?"

"Why, yes, devil take you!"

"You take the second street to the left and then the first to the right. It is Number Fifteen."

"Thank you, my boy. There is something for you."

"Thank you, Monsieur."

And Varajou went out of the café repeating "Second to the left, first to the right, Number Fifteen." But at the end of a few seconds he thought: "Second to the left—yes. But on leaving the café must I walk to the right or to the left? Bah! it cannot be helped; we shall see."

He walked on, turned down the second street to

the left, then the first to the right, and looked for Number Fifteen. It was a fine-looking house, and one could see behind the closed blinds that the windows were lighted on the first floor. The hall door was left partly open, and a lamp was burning in the vestibule. The non-commissioned officer thought to himself:

"This looks all right."

He went in, and as no one appeared he called out:

"Hello, there, hello!"

A little maid appeared and looked astonished at seeing a soldier. He said:

"Good evening, little one. Are the ladies upstairs?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"In the parlor? "

"Yes, Monsieur."

"May I go up?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"The door opposite the stairs?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

He ascended the stairs, opened a door, and saw sitting in a room, well lighted by two lamps, chandelier, and two candelabras with candles in them, four ladies in evening dress apparently expecting someone.

Three of them, the younger ones, remained seated, with rather a formal air, on some crimson velvet chairs, while the fourth, who was about

forty-five, was arranging some flowers in a vase. She was very stout, and wore a green silk dress cut *decolleté* with short sleeves, allowing her enormous arms and massive red neck, covered with powder, to escape as a huge flower from its corolla.

The officer saluted them, saying:

"Good evening, ladies."

The older woman turned round, appeared surprised, but bowed.

"Good evening, Monsieur."

He sat down. But, seeing that they did not welcome him eagerly, he thought that possibly only commissioned officers were admitted to the house, and this made him uneasy. But he thought:

"Bah! if one comes in we can soon tell."

He then remarked:

"Are you all well?"

The large lady, no doubt the mistress of the house, replied:

"Very well, thank you!"

He could think of nothing else to say, and they were all silent. But at last, being ashamed of his bashfulness and with an awkward laugh, he said:

"Don't people have any amusement in this country? I will pay for a bottle of wine—"

He had not finished his sentence when the door opened and in walked Padoie, dressed in a black suit.

Varajou gave a shout of joy and, rising from his seat, he rushed at his brother-in-law, put his

arms around him, and waltzed him round the room, shouting:

"Here is Padoie! Here is Padoie! Here is Padoie!"

Then, letting go of the tax-collector, he exclaimed as he looked him in the face:

"Oh, oh, oh, you scamp, you scamp! You are out for a good time, too. Oh, you scamp! And my sister! Are you tired of her, say?"

As he thought of all that he might gain through this unexpected situation, the forced loan, the inevitable blackmail, he flung himself on the sofa and laughed so heartily that the piece of furniture creaked all over.

The three young ladies, rising simultaneously, made their escape, while the older woman retreated to the door, looking as if she were about to faint.

Then two gentlemen appeared in evening dress and wearing the ribbons of an order. Padoie rushed up to them.

"Oh, Judge," he exclaimed, "he is crazy, he is crazy! He was sent to us as a convalescent. You can see that he is insane."

Varajou was sitting up now, and not being able to understand it all, he guessed that he had committed some monstrous folly. Then he rose, and, turning to his brother-in-law, said:

"What house is this?"

But Padoie, becoming furious, stammered out:

"What house — what — what house is this?

Wretch! Scoundrel! Villain! What house, indeed? The house of the Judge! Of the Judge of the Supreme Court—of the Supreme Court—of the Supreme Court! Oh! oh!—rascal!—rascal!—rascal! —rascal!"

MOIRON

AS we were still talking about Pranzini, Monsieur Maloureau, who had been Attorney General under the Empire said: "Oh, I formerly knew a very curious affair—curious for several reasons, as you will see.

"I was at that time Imperial Attorney in one of the provinces. I had to take up the case that has remained famous under the name of the Moiron case.

"Monsieur Moiron, who was a teacher in the north of France, enjoyed an excellent reputation throughout the country. He was a person of intelligence, quiet, very religious, a little tactiturn; he had married in the District of Boislinot, where he exercised his profession. He had had three children, and all of them had died from lung disease. From this time he seemed to bestow upon the youngsters confided to his care all the tenderness of his heart. With his own money he bought toys for his best pupils and for the good boys; he gave them little dinners and stuffed them with delicacies, sweet

things and cakes. Everybody loved this good man with such a big heart, when suddenly, in a strange manner, five of his pupils died, one after another. People looked for an epidemic in the water, resulting from the drought; they looked for the causes without being able to discover them, the more so that the symptoms were so strange. The children seemed to be attacked by a languishing sickness; they would no longer eat, they complained of pains in their stomachs, dragged along for a short time, and died in frightful suffering.

"A post-mortem examination was held over the last one, but nothing was found. The vitals were sent to Paris and analyzed, and they revealed the presence of no toxic substance.

"For a year nothing new developed; then two little boys, the best scholars in the class, Moiron's favorites, died within four days of each other. An examination of the bodies was again ordered, and in both of them were discovered tiny fragments of crushed glass. The conclusion arrived at was that the two boys must have eaten from some carelessly cleaned receptacle. A glass broken over a pail of milk could have produced this frightful accident, and the affair would have been pushed no further if Moiron's servant had not been taken sick at this time. The physician who was called in noticed the same symptoms that he had seen in the children. He questioned her and obtained the admission that she had stolen and eaten some confections that were bought by the teacher for his pupils.

"On an order from the court the schoolhouse was searched, and a closet was found which was full of toys and dainties destined for the children. Almost all the delicacies contained bits of crushed glass or pieces of broken needles!

"Moiron was immediately arrested; but he seemed so astonished and indignant at the suspicion hanging over him that he was almost released. However, indications of his guilt kept appearing, and I struggled in my mind with my first conviction, based on his excellent reputation, on his whole life, on the complete absence of any motives for such a crime.

"Why should this good, simple, religious man have killed children, and the very children whom he seemed to love the most, whom he spoiled and stuffed with sweet things, for whom he spent half his salary in buying toys and bonbons?

"One must believe him insane in order to think him guilty of this act. Now, Moiron appeared so normal, so quiet, so full of reason and common sense, that it seemed impossible he should be touched by madness.

"However, the proofs kept growing! In none of the sweets that were bought at the places where the schoolmaster secured his provisions could the slightest fragment of anything suspicious be found.

"He then pretended that an unknown enemy must have opened his cupboard with a false key in order to introduce the glass and the needles into

the eatables. And he imagined the whole story of an inheritance depending upon the death of a child, looked for by some peasant, and obtained thus, by casting suspicions on the schoolmaster. This brute, he argued, did not care about the other children who were thus forced to die.

"The story was possible. The man appeared to be so sure of himself and in such despair that we should undoubtedly have acquitted him, notwithstanding the charges against him, if two crushing discoveries had not been made, one after the other.

"The first was a snuffbox full of crushed glass; his own snuffbox, hidden in the desk where he kept his money!

"He explained this new find in an acceptable manner, as the ruse of the real unknown criminal. But a mercer from Saint-Marlof came to the presiding judge and said that a gentleman had several times come to his store to buy needles; and he always asked for the thinnest needles he could find, and would break them to see whether they pleased him: The man was brought forward in the presence of a dozen or more persons, and immediately recognized Moiron. The inquest revealed that the schoolmaster had indeed gone into Saint-Marlof on the days mentioned by the tradesman.

"I will pass over the terrible testimony of children on the choice of dainties and the care which he took to have them eat the things before him, and to do away with the slightest trace.

"Public opinion became exasperated, and demanded capital punishment, and it became more and more insistent.

"Moiron was condemned to death, and his appeal was rejected. Nothing was left for him but the imperial pardon, and I knew through my father that the Emperor would not grant it.

"One morning, as I was working in my study, the visit of the prison almoner was announced. He was an old priest who knew men well and understood the habits of criminals. He seemed troubled, ill at ease, nervous. After talking for a few minutes about one thing and another, he arose and said suddenly: 'If Moiron is executed, Monsieur, you will have killed an innocent man.'

"Then he left without bowing, leaving behind him a deep impression with his words. He had pronounced them in such a sincere and solemn manner, opening, in order to save a life, these lips closed and sealed by the secret of confession.

"An hour later I left for Paris, and my father immediately asked that I be granted an audience with the Emperor.

"The following day I was received. His Majesty was working in a little study when we were introduced. I exposed the whole affair, and I was just telling about the priest's visit when a door opened behind the sovereign's chair and the Empress, who thought him alone, appeared. His Majesty, Napoleon, consulted her. As soon as she had

heard the matter, she exclaimed: 'Since this man is innocent, he must be pardoned.'

"Why did this sudden conviction of a religious woman cast a terrible doubt in my mind?

"Until then I had ardently desired a change of sentence. And now I suddenly felt myself the toy, the dupe of a cunning criminal who had employed the priest and confession as a last means of defense.

"I explained my hesitancy to their Majesties. The Emperor remained undecided, urged on one side by his natural kindness, and held back on the other by the fear of being deceived by a criminal; but the Empress, who was convinced that the priest had obeyed a divine inspiration, kept repeating: 'Never mind! It is better to spare a criminal than to kill an innocent man!' Her advice was taken and the death sentence was commuted to one of hard labor.

"A few years later I heard that Moiron had again been called to the Emperor's attention on account of his exemplary conduct in the prison at Toulon, and was now employed as a servant by the director of the penitentiary.

"For a long time I heard nothing more of this man.

"But about two years ago, while I was spending a summer near Lille with my cousin, De Larielle, I was informed one evening, just as we were sitting down to dinner, that a priest wished to speak to me.

"I had him snown in, and he begged me to come to a dying man who desired absolutely to see me. This had often happened to me in my long career as a magistrate, and, although set aside by the Republic, I was still often called upon in a similar way. I, therefore, followed the priest, who led me to a miserable little room in a large tenement house.

"There I found a strange-looking man reclining on a bed of straw, with his back to the wall, in order better to breathe. He looked like a skeleton, with dark, gleaming eyes.

"As soon as he saw me, he murmured: 'Don't you recognize me?'

" 'No.'

" 'I am Moiron.'

"A shiver ran through me, and I asked: 'The schoolmaster?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'How do you happen to be here?'

" 'That story is too long, I haven't time to tell it—I was going to die—and that priest was brought to me—and as I knew that you were here I sent for you. It is to you that I wish to confess, since you were the one who saved my life—formerly.'

"His hands contracted over the straw of his bed; and he continued in a hoarse, energetic, and low voice: 'You see—I owe you the truth—I owe it to you—for it must be told to someone before I leave this earth.

" 'It was I who killed the children—all of them —I did it for revenge!

" 'Listen. I was an honest, straightforward, pure man—adoring God—this good Father—this Master who teaches us to love, and not the false God, the executioner, the robber, the murderer who governs the earth. I never had done any harm, I never had committed an evil act. I was as good as it is possible to be, Monsieur.

" 'I married and had children, and I loved them as no father or mother ever loved their children. I lived only for them. I was wild about them. All three of them died! Why? why? What had I done? I felt revolted, furious; and suddenly my eyes were opened as if I were waking up out of a sleep; I understood that God is bad. Why had He killed my children? I opened my eyes and saw that He loves to kill. He loves only that, Monsieur. He gives life but to destroy it! God, Monsieur, is a murderer! He needs death every day. And He makes it in every variety, in order better to be amused. He has invented sickness and accidents in order to give Him diversion over the winter months and through the years; and when He grows tired of this, He has epidemics, the pest, cholera, diphtheria, smallpox, everything possible! But this does not satisfy Him; all these things are too similar; and so from time to time He has wars, in order to see two hundred thousand soldiers killed at once, crushed in blood and in the mud, gutted, their

arms and legs torn off, their heads smashed by bullets, like eggs falling on the pavement.

" 'But this is not all. He has made men who eat each other. And then, as men become better than He, He has made beasts, in order to see men hunt them, kill, and eat them. That is not all. He has made tiny little animals which live one day, flies that die by the million in one hour, ants which we are continually crushing under our feet, and so many, many others that we cannot even imagine. And all these things are continually killing one another and dying. And the good Lord looks on and is amused, for He sees everything, the big ones as well as the little ones, those who are in the drops of water and those in the other firmaments. He watches them and is amused. Wretch!

" 'Then, Monsieur, I began to kill children. I played a trick on Him. He did not get those, it was I who did. Not He, but I! And I would have killed many others, but you caught me. There!

" 'I was to be executed. I! How He would have laughed! Then I asked for a priest, and I lied. I confessed. I lied and I lived.'

" 'Now, all is over. I can no longer escape from Him. I no longer fear Him, Monsieur, I despise Him too much.'

"This poor wretch was frightful to see as he lay there gasping, opening an enormous mouth in order to let out words that could scarcely be heard, choking and spitting, picking at his bed and kicking

around under a filthy sheet as if trying to escape.

"Oh! Even the memory of it is frightful!

"I asked him: 'You have nothing more to say?'

" 'No, Monsieur.'

" 'Then, farewell.'

" 'Farewell, Monsieur, till some day.'

"I turned to the ashen-faced priest, whose dark outline stood out against the wall, and asked. 'Are you going to stay here, Monsieur l'Abbé?'

" 'Yes.'

"Then the dying man cackled: 'Yes, yes, he sends the vultures to the corpses.'

"I had had enough of this; I opened the door and ran away."

MONSIEUR BOMBARD'S LITTLE GAME

SIMON BOMBARD frequently found life very trying. He was born with an incredible aptitude for idleness and an immoderate desire to avoid thwarting this tendency. Every moral or physical exertion, anything in the nature of work, seemed to him too great an effort for his strength. As soon as any serious topic was broached, his attention wandered, his mind being incapable of any strain.

His father had a notion store at Caen, and the son had taken life easy, as his family said, until he was twenty-five. But his parents were always nearer bankruptcy than making affluence, and he suffered very much from lack of money.

He was a big, handsome fellow, with red whiskers cut in the Norman fashion, a florid complexion, blue eyes with a happy, stupid expression, and was growing stout; he dressed himself with the loud elegance of a provincial in holiday attire. He laughed, vociferated, gesticulated at everything that was said, displaying a boisterous

good humor with the assurance of a traveling man. He considered that life was meant solely for joking or buffoonery, and as soon as he had to restrain his noisy mirth he became sleepy, incapable even of sadness.

His lack of money worried him, and he habitually repeated:

"If I had ten thousand francs a year I would be an executioner."

Every year he passed two weeks at Trouville, and called that "spending the season." He stayed with his cousins, who let him have a room, and every day he walked up and down the board walk along the beach.

He walked with a firm step, his hands in his pockets or behind his back, always wearing roomy clothes, light waistcoats, and loud cravats, with his hat on one side and a penny cigar in the corner of his mouth.

He passed close beside well-dressed women, looking at the men with the air of a young fellow ready to pick a quarrel, and seeking—seeking—for he was seeking something. He was seeking a wife, trusting to his face and physique to win him favor. He had said to himself:

"The devil! I can certainly find what I want among the crowds that come here." And he sought it with the instinct of a hunting dog, the instinct of a Norman, positive that at first sight he could recognize the woman who would make his fortune.

One Monday morning he was saying to himself: "Why—why—why?"

The weather was superb, one of those blue and yellow days in July when it seems to be raining down heat. The immense beach was covered with people in elegant toilets and bright colors, and looked like a garden. The fishing-smacks with their brown sails reflected in the motionless blue water, seemed to be sleeping beneath the morning sun, some quite close to the wooden wharf, others farther off, and some far in the distance, as if overcome by the indolence of a summer day, and too indifferent to go out to sea or even to come into the harbor. And yonder, in a mist, one could perceive the coast of Havre with two white elevations at its highest point, the light-houses of St. Adresse.

"Why—why—why?" he had said, on meeting her for the third time, and feeling that her glance was directed on him, the glance of a mature woman of the world, who sought an acquaintance.

He had noticed her on previous days, for she also appeared to be looking for someone. She was English, quite tall and rather thin, the bold Englishwoman whom travel and circumstances have rendered mannish. However, she was not bad-looking, walked with a short, decisive step, dressed plainly and neatly, but her headgear was peculiar, as their headgear always is. She had rather handsome eyes, high cheekbones, rather too red, and long teeth, which she always displayed.

When he reached the dock he turned round and walked back again to see whether he should meet her once more. He did so, and she looked at him as much as to say:

"Here I am."

But how could she speak to him?

He walked back again for the fifth time, and as they approached face-to-face she let fall her umbrella. He darted forward, picked it up, and handed it to her, saying:

"Allow me, Madame——"

"*Aôh*, you are very kind," she replied, in poor French. And they looked at each other. They knew not what to say. She was blushing. Suddenly, gathering courage, he said:

"What beautiful weather this is!"

"*Aôh*, delicious!" she murmured.

And they stood there facing each other, embarrassed, but not thinking, either of them, of moving away. It was she who had the courage to ask:

"Are you going to be here long?"

"Oh, yes; as long as I wish," he replied. Then, abruptly, he said:

"Would you like to walk to the pier? It is very pretty on a day like this."

"I should like it," she answered simply.

And they walked along side-by-side, she with a short, decisive step, and he with a swinging gait, like a strutting turkey.

Three months later merchants of Caen received

one morning, a large white wedding announcement:

"Monsieur and Madame Prosper Bombard have the honor to inform you of the marriage of their son, Simon Bombard, to Madame Kate Robinson, widow."

And on the other side:

"Madame Kate Robinson, widow, has the honor to inform you of her marriage to Monsieur Simon Bombard."

They settled in Paris. The bride's fortune was fifteen thousand francs a year, free from incumbrance. Simon wanted four hundred francs a month for his personal expenses. He had no difficulty in proving it and in obtaining his wish.

All went smoothly at first. Madame Bombard was certainly not young, and had lost much of her freshness; but she had a way of exacting things which made it impossible to refuse her. She would say, with her English accent:

"Oh, Simon, now we must go to bed," and Simon would start toward the bed like a dog that is ordered "To your kennel." And she knew how to get her way on every occasion.

She never was angry, never made scenes, never screamed; she never looked cross or hurt, or even sulky. She simply knew how to say a thing, that was all. And she always spoke to the point, in a tone that admitted of no reply.

More than once Simon was about to demur; but

he always ended by yielding to the decisive and imperious wishes of this singular woman. However, as his married life seemed rather monotonous, and as he had enough money to amuse himself with, he lost no opportunity of doing so, but he had to be very cautious.

Madame Bombard perceived his infidelity, without his surmising in what manner, and she announced, one evening, that she had hired a house in Mantes, where they would reside in future.

His existence became less bearable. He tried to amuse himself in many ways, but they were not as satisfactory as making conquests of women. He went fishing, knew how to distinguish between the places frequented by gudgeon, by carp, or by roach; the favorite haunts of bream, and the various baits that tempted the different fish. But while he watched his float bobbing in the water his mind was on other things.

He became friendly with the head of the office of the sub-prefecture and with the captain of gendarmes, and they played whist in the evening at the Café de Commerce, but as his mind's eye saw the queen of clubs or the queen of diamonds, his mind became muddled at the thought of these figures with heads but no nether extremities.

Then he thought of a scheme, the veritable scheme of a cunning Norman. He got his wife to employ a maid that he chose, not a pretty, dressy coquette, but a strong, red-faced girl, who would

not awaken suspicion and whom he had prepared to carry out his plans. She was recommended to them privately by the director of customs, a complaisant friend who was in the plot and answered for her in every particular. Madame Bombard, suspecting nothing, accepted the treasure thus sent to her.

Simon was happy, but cautiously so, with some fear, and with incredible difficulties to contend with. He could not escape his wife's anxious watchfulness except for a few moments now and then, and was always uneasy. He sought some ruse, some stratagem, and finally discovered one that was perfectly successful.

Madame Bombard, who had nothing to occupy her, retired early, and Bombard, who played whist at the Café de Commerce, always came home precisely at half-past nine. He had arranged for Victorine to wait for him in the dark in the hallway of the house, on the steps of the vestibule. When, at the end of a few minutes, the girl retired to her attic with a gold piece in her hand, Bombard laughed in triumph, repeating aloud like the barber of King Midas as he was fishing for bleak-fish among the reeds in the river:

"Fooled this time, Madame."

And the pleasure of fooling Madame Bombard was worth to him all that was lacking in his matrimonial arrangements.

One evening Victorine was waiting for him as usual on the steps, but she seemed more lively,

more animated than usual, and they remained together about ten minutes in the hall. When he entered the bedroom Madame Bombard was not there. A cold chill ran down his back, and he sank into a chair, tortured with anxiety.

Just then she appeared, a candlestick in her hand.

"Did you go out?" he said tremblingly.

"I went to the kitchen to get a glass of water," she replied calmly.

He endeavored to allay whatever suspicions she might have, but she seemed quiet, happy, and trusting, and he was reassured.

The following morning when they went to breakfast Victorine was putting the cutlets on the table. When she was moving away from the table Madame Bombard held out a gold piece to her with the tips of her fingers, and said in her calm, serious tone:

"Here, my girl, here is twenty francs that I deprived you of last night. I return it to you."

And the astonished maid took the gold piece, which she gazed at in stupid amazement, while Bombard, terrified, stared at his wife with round, wide-open eyes.

MADAME BAPTISTE

AS I entered the waiting-room of the station at Loubain, the first thing I did was to look at the clock, and I found that I had to wait two hours and ten minutes for the express train for Paris.

I had walked twenty miles and felt suddenly weary. Not seeing anything on the walls of the station to amuse me, I went outside and stood there cudgeling my brains to think of something to do. The street was a kind of boulevard, planted with acacias, and on either side was a row of houses of varying shape and different styles of architecture, such as one sees only in a small town; the long street ascended a slight acclivity, at the extreme end of which were some trees, giving the appearance of a park.

Occasionally a cat crossed the street and leaped carefully over the gutters. A dog sniffed at every tree and hunted for scraps from the kitchens, but I did not see a single human being, and I felt listless and bored. What could I do with myself?

I was already thinking of the inevitable and interminable visit to the small café at the railway station, where I should be compelled to sit over a glass of undrinkable beer and an illegible newspaper, when suddenly I saw a funeral procession coming out of a side street into the one in which I stood, and even the sight of the hearse was a relief to me. At any rate it would give me something to do for ten minutes. Suddenly, however, my curiosity was aroused. The hearse was followed by eight gentlemen, one of whom was weeping, while the others were chatting together, but there was no priest, and I said to myself:

"This is a non-religious funeral," reflecting that a town like Loubain must contain at least a hundred free-thinkers, who would make a point of manifesting their views. What could it be? The rapid pace of the procession proved clearly that the body was to be buried without ceremony, and consequently without the rites of the Church.

My idle curiosity framed the most complicated surmises, and, as the hearse passed me, a strange idea struck me: to follow it with the eight gentlemen. That would occupy my time for an hour, at least, and accordingly I walked with the others, with a sad look on my face; on seeing this, the last couple turned round in surprise, and then spoke to each other in a low voice.

They asked each other, no doubt, whether I belonged to the town, and then they consulted the

two in front of them, who stared at me in turn. This close scrutiny annoyed me, and to put an end to it I approached them, and after bowing I said:

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, for interrupting your conversation, but, seeing a civil funeral, I have followed it, although I did not know the deceased gentleman whom you are accompanying."

"It was a woman," one of them said.

I was much surprised at hearing this, and asked:

"But it is a civil funeral, is it not?"

The other gentleman, who evidently wished to tell me all about it, said: "Yes and no. The clergy have refused to allow us the use of the church."

On hearing this, I uttered a prolonged "A—h!" of astonishment. I could not understand it at all, but my obliging neighbor continued:

"It is a rather long story. This young woman committed suicide, and that is the reason why she cannot be buried with any religious ceremony. The gentleman who is walking ahead, and who is weeping, is her husband."

"You surprise and interest me very much, Monsieur," I replied with some hesitation. "Shall I be indiscreet if I ask you to tell me the facts of the case? If I am troubling you, forget that I have said anything about the matter."

The gentleman took my arm familiarly.

"Not at all, not at all. Let us linger a little behind the others, and I will tell it you, although it is a very sad story. We have plenty of time before

reaching the cemetery, the trees of which you see up yonder, for it is a hard climb up this hill.

"This young woman, Madame Paul Hamot," he began, "was the daughter of a wealthy merchant in the neighborhood, Monsieur Fontanelle. When she was a mere child of eleven, she had a terrible adventure; a footman attacked her and she nearly died. A terrible criminal case was the result, and the man was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

"The little girl grew up, stigmatized by disgrace, isolated, without any companions, and grown-up persons would hardly kiss her, for they thought that they would soil their lips if they touched her forehead, and she became a sort of monster, a phenomenon to all the town. People said to each other in a whisper: 'You know, that little Fontanelle,' and turned away in the street when she passed. Her parents could not even get a nurse to take her out for a walk, as the other servants held aloof from her, as if contact with her would poison everyone that came near her.

"It was pitiable to see the poor child go out to play every afternoon. She remained by herself, standing by her maid, and looking at the other children amusing themselves. Sometimes, yielding to an irresistible desire to play with other children, she advanced timidly, with nervous movements, and mingled with a group, with furtive steps, as if conscious of her own disgrace. Immediately, the mothers, aunts, and nurses would come running

from every seat, and take the children intrusted to their care by the hand and drag them roughly away.

"Little Fontanelle would stand isolated, wretched, without understanding what it meant; then she would begin to cry, nearly heartbroken with grief, and run and hide her head in her nurse's lap, sobbing.

"As she grew up, the situation was still worse. Parents kept the girls from her as if she were stricken with the plague. Remember that she had nothing to learn, nothing; that she no longer had the right to the symbolical wreath of orange-flowers; that almost before she could read she had penetrated that redoubtable mystery that mothers hardly allow their daughters to guess at, trembling as they enlighten them on the eve of marriage.

"When she went through the streets, always accompanied by her governess, as if her parents feared some fresh, terrible adventure, with her eyes cast down under the load of that mysterious disgrace which she felt was always weighing upon her, the other girls, who were not nearly so innocent as people thought, whispered and giggled as they looked at her knowingly, and immediately turned their heads absently, if she happened to look at them. People barely greeted her; only a few men bowed to her, and the mothers pretended not to see her, while some young devils called her Madame Baptiste, after the name of the footman who had attacked her.

"No one knew the secret torture of her mind, for she rarely spoke, and never laughed, and her parents themselves appeared uncomfortable in her presence, as if they bore her a constant grudge for some irreparable fault. An honest man would not willingly give his hand to a liberated convict, would he, even if that convict were his own son? So Monsieur and Madame Fontanelle looked on their daughter as they would have on a son who had been released from prison. She was pretty and pale, tall, slender, distinguished-looking, and she would have pleased me very much, Monsieur, but for that unfortunate affair.

"Well, when a new sub-prefect was appointed here, eighteen months ago, he brought his private secretary with him. He was a queer sort of fellow, who had lived in the Latin Quarter, it appears. He saw Mademoiselle Fontanelle, and fell in love with her, and when people told him of what occurred, he only said: 'Pooh! That is only a guaranty for the future, and I would rather it had happened before I married her than afterward. I shall live tranquilly with that woman.'

"He paid his addresses to her, asked for her hand, and married her, and then, not being lacking in assurance, he paid wedding-calls, as if nothing unusual had happened. Some people returned them, others did not; but, at last, the affair began to be forgotten, and she took her proper place in society.

"She adored her husband as if he had been a god; for, you must remember, he had restored her to honor and to social life, had braved public opinion, faced insults, in a word, had performed such a courageous act as few men would undertake, and she felt the most exalted and tender love for him.

"When she became *enceinte,* and it was known, the most particular persons and the greatest sticklers for propriety opened their doors to her, as if she had been definitely purified by maternity.

"It is strange, but so it is, and thus everything was going on as well as possible until the other day, which was the feast of the patron saint of our town. The Prefect, surrounded by his staff and the authorities, presided at the musical competition, and when he had finished his speech the distribution of medals began, which Paul Hamot, his private secretary, handed to those who were entitled to them.

"As you know, there are always jealousies and rivalries, which make people forget all propriety. All the ladies of the town were assembled on the platform, and, in his turn, the bandmaster from the village of Mourmillon came up. This band was to receive only a second-class medal, for one cannot give first-class medals to everybody, can one? But when the private secretary handed him his badge, the man threw it in his face, and exclaimed:

" 'You may keep your medal for Baptiste. You owe him a first-class one, also, just as you owe me one.'

"A number of people began to laugh. The common herd are neither charitable nor refined, and every eye was turned toward that poor lady. Have you ever seen a woman going mad, Monsieur? Well, we were present at the sight! She arose, then fell back on her chair three times in succession, as if she wished to make her escape, but saw that she could not make her way through the crowd, and then another voice in the crowd exclaimed:

"'Oh! Oh! Madame Baptiste!'

"A great uproar, partly of laughter and partly of indignation, arose. The word was repeated over and over again; people stood on tip-toe to see the unhappy woman's face; husbands lifted their wives up in their arms, so that they might see her, and people asked: 'Which is she? The one in blue?'

"The boys crowed like cocks, and laughter was heard all over the place.

"She did not move now on her state chair, but sat as if she had been put there for the crowd to look at. She could not move, nor conceal herself, nor hide her face. Her eyelids closed quickly, as if a vivid light were shining on them, and she breathed heavily like a horse that is going up a steep hill, so that it almost broke one's heart to see her. Meanwhile, however, Monsieur Hamot had seized the ruffian by the throat, and they were rolling on the ground together, amid a scene of confusion, and the ceremony was interrupted.

"An hour later, as the Hamots were returning home, the young woman, who had not uttered a word since the insult, but who trembled continually as if all her nerves had been set in motion by springs, suddenly sprang over the parapet of the bridge, and threw herself into the river, before her husband could prevent her. The water is very deep under the arches, and it was two hours before her body was recovered. Of course, she was dead."

The narrator stopped, and then added:

"It was, perhaps, the best thing she could do in the circumstances. There are some things that cannot be wiped out; and now you understand the reason that the clergy refuse to have her taken into church. Ah! If it had been a religious funeral the whole town would have been present; but you can understand that her suicide added to the other affair and made families abstain from attending her funeral; besides, it is not an easy matter here to attend a funeral that is performed without religious rites."

We passed through the cemetery gates, and I waited, much affected by what I had heard, until the coffin had been lowered into the grave, before I went up to the poor man who was sobbing violently, to press his hand warmly. He looked at me in surprise through his tears, and then said:

"Thank you, Monsieur." And I did not regret that I had followed that funeral procession.

THE PARISIAN ACCENT

A LARGE house stood upon white terraces overshadowed by vines whence one had a view of the sea. Tall pines formed a dome over the portico. There was a look of neglect and loneliness about the place, such as impresses one after a death or the departure of friends for other lands.

The interior wore a strange look, with unpacked boxes serving for wardrobes, and piles of band-boxes standing about. There was an array of moth-eaten armchairs, into which bits of velvet and silk, cut from old gowns, had been twisted clumsily to make seats, and along the walls were rows of rusty nails which made one think of old portraits and pictures full of associations, that, one by one, had been bought for a low price by some second-hand furniture dealer.

The rooms were in disorder and were furnished in a nondescript fashion, while velvet draperies hung upon the walls and in the corners, and seemed to show that, as the servants were no longer paid except by hopes, they no longer did more than give

them a casual, careless touch with the broom. The drawing-room, which was extremely large, was full of useless knicknacks, rubbish that is put up for sale at stalls at watering-places, besides numerous daubs—they could not be called paintings—of portraits and of flowers, and an old piano with yellow keys.

Such was the home where she who had been called the handsome Madame de Maurillac was spending her monotonous existence, like some unfortunate doll which capricious, childish hands have thrown into a corner—she who had almost passed for a professional beauty, and whose coquetries—at least so the faithful ones of the party said—had been able to excite a fleeting and last spark of desire in the dull eyes of the Emperor.

Like many others, she and her husband had waited for his return from Elba, had discounted a fresh, immediate chance, had kept up boldly, and had spent the remains of their fortune at that game of luxury.

On the day, when the illusion vanished and he was forced to awake from his dream, Monsieur de Maurillac, without considering that he was leaving his wife and daughter almost penniless, but not being able to make up his mind to come down in the world, to vegetate, to fight his creditors, to accept the alms of some sinecure, poisoned himself, like a shopgirl who is forsaken by her scornful sweetheart.

Madame de Maurillac did not mourn for him, and as this lamentable disaster made her interesting, and as she was assisted and supported by unexpected acts of kindness, and had a good adviser in one of those old Parisian lawyers who can get anyone out of the greatest difficulties, she managed to save something from the wreck, and to retain a small income. Reassured and emboldened, and resting her ultimate illusions and chimerical hopes on her daughter's radiant beauty, and preparing for that last game in which they would risk everything (and perhaps hoping also that she herself might marry again), the ancient coquette arranged to live a double life.

For months at a time she would disappear from the world, and as a pretext for her isolation and for hiding herself in the country she alleged her daughter's delicate health, and also important interests she had to look after in the south of France.

Her frivolous friends looked upon this as a great act of heroism, as something almost superhuman, so courageous that incessant letters kept her up religiously in all the scandal and love adventures; in the falls as well as in the apotheoses of the capital.

The difficult struggle Madame de Maurillac had to make in order to maintain her rank was really as fine as any of those campaigns in the twilight of glory, or those slow retreats where men give way only inch by inch and fight until the last cartridge

is expended, until at last fresh troops arrive, reenforcements which bar the way to the enemy, and save the threatened flag.

Broken in by the same discipline and haunted by the same dream, mother and daughter lived on almost nothing in the dull, dilapidated house, which the peasants called "the château," and economized like poor people who have only a few hundred francs a year on which to live. But Fabienne de Maurillac developed well in spite of everything, and grew up into a woman like some rare flower which is reared in a conservatory and preserved from the harsh outside air.

In order that she might not lose her Parisian accent by speaking too much with the servants, who remained peasants under their livery, Madame de Maurillac—who had not been able to bring a lady's maid with her, because of the extra cost her traveling expenses and wages would have entailed, and who, moreover, was afraid that some indiscretion might betray her maneuvers and cover her with ridicule—made up her mind to wait on her daughter herself. Fabienne talked with nobody but her, saw nobody but her, and was like a little novice in a convent. No one was allowed to speak to her, or to interrupt her walks in the large garden, or on the white terraces reflected in the blue water.

As soon as the season for the country and the seaside came, however, they packed their trunks

and locked the doors of their house of exile. As they were not known, by taking those terrible trains that stop at every station, and by which travelers arrive at their destination in the middle of the night, with the certainty that nobody will be waiting for you and see you get out of the carriage, they traveled third class, so that they might have a few banknotes the more with which to make a show.

A fortnight in Paris in the family house in Auteuil, a fortnight in which to try on gowns and hats and to show themselves, and then Trouville, Aix, or Biarritz, the whole round complete, with parties succeeding parties; money was spent as if they did not know its value; balls at the casinos, continual flirtations, compromising intimacies, and the kind of admirers who immediately surround two pretty women, one in the radiant beauty of eighteen years, and the other in the brightness of that maturity which beautiful September days bring with them.

Unfortunately, however, they had to do the same thing over again every year, and as if bad luck intended to follow them implacably, Madame de Maurillac and her daughter did not succeed in their endeavors; they did not manage during their usual absence from home to pick up some fine gentleman who fell in love immediately, who took them seriously and asked for Fabienne's hand; consequently, they were very unhappy. Their energies flagged, and their courage oozed away like water, that es-

capes, drop by drop, through a crack in a jug. They grew low-spirited and no longer dared to be frank with each other and to exchange confidences and projects.

Fabienne, with her pale cheeks, her large eyes with blue circles round them, and her tight lips, looked like some captive princess who is tormented by constant ennui and troubled by evil suggestions, who dreams of flight and of escape from that prison where Fate holds her captive.

One night, when the sky was covered with heavy thunderclouds and the heat was most oppressive, Madame de Maurillac called her daughter, whose room was next to hers. After calling loudly for some time in vain, she sprang out of bed in terror and almost broke open the door with her trembling hands. The room was empty and the pillows were untouched.

Almost distracted, and foreseeing some irreparable misfortune, the poor woman ran all over the large house, and then rushed out into the garden, where the air was heavy with the scent of flowers. She had the appearance of some wild animal pursued by a pack of hounds, tried to penetrate the darkness with her anxious looks, and gasped as if someone were holding her by the throat; but suddenly she staggered, uttered a painful cry, and fell down in a fit.

There, before her, in the shadow of the myrtle-trees, Fabienne was sitting on the knees of a man—

the gardener!—with both arms round his neck and kissing him ardently; and, as if to defy her mother and show her how vain all her precautions and her vigilance had been, the girl was telling her lover, in the country dialect and in a cooing and delightful voice, how she adored him, and that she would be his. . . .

Madame de Maurillac is now in a hospital for the insane, and Fabienne has married the gardener.

What could she have done better?

A FASHIONABLE WOMAN

IT is easy to show that Austria is far richer in men of genius in every art than Northern Germany, yet, lacking any special technical training, few of them ever become more than mere *dilettanti,* although soldiers, they receive the same systematic military education for their chosen vocation as do the members of the Prussian army.

Leo Wolfram was an intellectual literary *dilettante,* and the more pleasure one took in his material characters, which were usually taken from real life, and in his political and plastics plots, the more one regretted that he had never learned to compose, or to delineate character, or to write; in one word, that he never had become a literary artist. That Wolfram had in him the making of a master in the art of narration is proved by his story, *Dissolving Views,* and by his *Goldkind.*

Goldkind, the heroine, is a striking type of our modern society woman, and the tale contains all the elements of a classic novel, although in a crude, unfinished state. How exactly Leo Wolfram portrayed the conditions of French society is shown in

the following reminiscences, in which an Austrian woman plays the chief part.

About ten years ago, four modishly dressed persons, who caused much comment there and elsewhere, dined every night at a table in one corner of the small dining-room of one of the best hotels in Vienna. They were an Austrian landowner, his charming wife, and two young diplomatists, one of whom came from the north while the other was a son of the south. There was no doubt that the lady was the center of general interest.

A practised and discriminating observer of human nature could easily recognize in her one of those characters which Goethe has so aptly named "enigmatical." They are always dissatisfied and at odds with themselves and the world, are a riddle to themselves, and never can be relied on. With these interesting and captivating, though unfortunate, contradictions in her nature, this woman made a strong impression on everyone, even by her mere outward appearance. She was one of those women who are called beautiful, without being really so. Her face, as well as her figure, was lacking in æsthetic lines, but there was no doubt that, in spite of this, or perhaps for that reason, she was one of the most dangerous and fascinating women that one could imagine.

She was tall and slender, with a certain hardness above her figure which became a charm through the vivacity and grace of her movements; her features

harmonized with her figure, for she had a high, intellectual, calm forehead, a strong mouth with sensual lips, and an angular chin, the sharp effect of which was diminished by her slightly tilted small nose, her beautifully arched eyebrows, and her large, animated, liquid blue eyes.

In her face, which was almost too expressive for a woman, there was as much feeling, kindness, and candor as there was calculation, coolness, and deceit, and when she was angry and curled her upper lip, so as to show her dazzling white teeth, it had even a devilish look of wickedness and cruelty. She had strikingly beautiful long chestnut hair, which she wore braided and wound like a coronet on top of her head. Besides this, she was remarkable for her elegant taste in dress and a bearing which combined with the dignity of a lady of rank that undefinable something which makes actresses and women of the higher *demi-monde* so interesting to us.

In Paris her respectability would have been questioned, but in Vienna the best drawing-rooms were open to her, and she was not looked upon as more or less respectable than other aristocratic beauties.

Her husband decidedly belonged to that class of men whom that witty writer, Balzac, so delightfully calls *les hommes prédestinés* in his *Physiologie du Mariage*. Without doubt he was a handsome man, but he bore that stamp of insignificance which so often conceals coarseness and vulgarity,

and was one of those men who, in the long run, become unendurable to a woman of refined tastes. He had a good private income, but his wife understood the art of enjoying life, and a deficit in the yearly accounts of the young couple became the rule, without causing the lively lady to check her aristocratic tastes in the least on that account; she kept horses and carriages, was a fine horsewoman, had her box at the opera, and gave delightful little suppers, all of which at that time was the highest aim of a Viennese woman of her class.

One of the two young diplomats who accompanied her, a young Count belonging to a well-known family in North Germany, a gentleman in the highest sense of the word, was looked upon as her devoted admirer, while the other, who was his most intimate friend in spite of his ancient name and his positon as *attaché* of a foreign legation, gave an impression that he was the kind of adventurer who makes the police keep a careful eye on him; he had also the reputation of being an unscrupulous and dangerous duelist. Short, thin, with a yellow complexion, with strongly marked but interesting features, an aquiline nose, and bright dark eyes, he was the typical picture of an unscrupulous male flirt and duelist.

The handsome woman appeared to be *éprise* of the Count, and to take an interest in his friend; at least that was the construction the others in the dining-room put upon the situation, so far as could

be construed from the behavior and looks of the persons concerned—especially from their looks, for the beautiful woman's blue eyes rested on the Count with affection and ardor, and on the Italian from time to time with wild, diabolical sympathy; and it was hard to guess whether there was more love or hatred in that glance. None of the four, however, who were now dining and chatting so gayly together, had any presentiment at the time that they were amusing themselves over a mine, which might explode at any moment and bury them all.

It was the husband of the beautiful woman who provided the tinder. One day he told her that she must make up her mind to the most rigid retrenchment, give up her box at the opera, and sell her carriage and horses, if she did not wish to risk her position in society. Her creditors had lost all patience, and were threatening to distrain on her property, and even to put her in prison. She made no reply to this revelation, but during dinner she said to the Count, in a whisper, that she must speak to him later, and would, therefore, come to see him at his house. When it was dark she came thickly veiled, and after she had responded to his demonstrations of affection for some time with more patience than amiability, she began. Their conversation is extracted from his diary.

"You are so unconcerned and happy, while misery and disgrace are threatening me!"

"Please explain what you mean!"

"I have incurred some debts."

"Again?" he said reproachfully. "Why do you not come to me at once, for you must do it in the end, and then at least you would avoid exposure?"

"Please do not scold me," she replied; "you know it only makes me angry. I want some money; can you give me some?"

"How much do you want?" She hesitated, for she had not the courage to name the real amount, but at last she said, in a low voice: "Five thousand florins." It was evidently only a small portion of what she really required, so he replied: "I am sure you want more than that!"

"No."

"Really not?"

"Do not make me angry."

He shrugged his shoulders, went to his strong-box, and gave her the money, whereupon she nodded, and, giving him her hand, she said: "You are always kind, and as long as I have you I am not afraid; but if I were to lose you I should be the most unhappy woman in the world."

"You always have the same fears; but I shall never leave you; it would be impossible for me to separate from you!" the Count exclaimed.

"And if you die?" she interrupted him hastily. "If I die?" the Count said, with a peculiar smile. "I have provided for you in that event, also."

"Do you mean to say——" she stammered, flushed, and her beautiful large eyes rested on her

lover with an indescribable expression in them. But he opened a drawer in his writing-table and took out a document, which he gave to her. It was his will. She opened it with almost indecent haste, and when she saw the amount—thirty thousand florins—she grew pale to her very lips.

It was a moment in which the germ of a crime was sown in her breast, but one of those crimes that cannot be touched by the Criminal Code. A few days after she had paid her visit to the Count she herself received one from the Italian. In the course of conversation he took a jewel-case from his breast-pocket and asked her opinion of the ornaments, as she was well known for her taste in such matters, telling her at the same time that it was intended as a present for an actress whom he admired.

"It is a magnificent set!" she said, as she looked at it. "You have made an excellent selection." Suddenly she became absorbed in thought, while her nostrils began to quiver, and that smile of cold cruelty played on her lips.

"Do you think that the lady for whom this ornament is intended will be pleased with it?" the Italian asked.

"Certainly," she replied; "I myself would give a great deal to own it."

"Then may I venture to offer it to you?" the Italian inquired.

She blushed, but did not refuse it. The same

evening she rushed to the Count's apartment in a state of the greatest excitement. "I am beside myself," she stammered; "I have been most deeply insulted."

"By whom?" the Count asked excitedly.

"By your friend, who has dared to send me some jewelry to-day. I suppose he looks upon me as belonging to the *demi-monde,* and this I owe to you, to you alone, and to my mad love for you, to which I have sacrificed my honor and everything. Everything!" She threw herself down and sobbed, and would not be pacified until the Count gave her his word of honor that he would set aside every consideration for his friend, and obtain satisfaction for her at any price. He met the Italian the same evening at a card party and questioned him.

"In the first place I did not send the lady the jewelry, but gave it to her myself—not, however, until she had asked me to do so."

"That is a shameful lie!" the Count shouted furiously. Unfortunately, others were present. His friend took the matter seriously, and the next morning sent his seconds to the Count.

Some of their real friends tried to settle the matter in another way, but his bad angel, the Viennese, who required thirty thousand florins, drove the Count to his death. He was found in the Prater with his friend's bullet in his breast. A letter in his pocket spoke of suicide, but the police did not doubt for a moment that a duel had taken place.

Suspicion soon fell on the Italian, but when they went to arrest him he had already made his escape.

The broken-hearted father of the man who had been killed in the duel had hastened to Vienna on receipt of a telegram, and a few hours after his arrival the husband of the beautiful enigmatical woman called on him and demanded money: "My wife was your son's most intimate friend," he stammered, in embarrassment, in order to justify his action as well as he could. "Oh! I know that," the old Count replied, "and female friends of that kind want to be paid immediately, and in full. Here are the thirty thousand florins."

And our Goldkind? She paid her debts, and then withdrew from the scene for a while. She had been compromised, certainly, but then she had risen in value in the eyes of a certain class of men who can adore and sacrifice themselves for a woman only when her foot is on the threshold of vice and crime.

I saw her last during the Franco-Prussian war, in the beautiful Mirabell Garden, at Salzburg. She did not appear to feel any qualms of conscience, for she had become considerably stouter, which made her more attractive, more beautiful, and consequently more dangerous than she was before.

MADEMOISELLE COCOTTE

WE were leaving the asylum when I saw a tall, thin man in a corner of the court who was obstinately pretending to call an imaginary dog. He was crying in a soft, tender voice: "Cocotte! Come here, Cocotte, my beauty!" and slapping his thigh as one does when calling an animal. I asked the physician: "Who is that man?" He answered: "Oh! he is not at all interesting. He is a coachman named François, who became insane after drowning his dog."

"Tell me his story. The most simple and humble things are sometimes those that touch our hearts most deeply."

Here is this man's adventure, which was obtained from a friend of his, a groom:

There was a family of rich *bourgeois* who lived in a suburb of Paris. They had a villa in the middle of a park, at the edge of the Seine. Their coachman was this François, a country fellow, a little heavy, kind-hearted, simple, and easy to deceive.

One evening, as he was returning home, a dog followed him. At first he paid no attention to it, but the creature's obstinacy at last made him turn around. He looked to see whether he knew this dog. No, he never had seen it. It was a nursing female, and frightfully thin. She was trotting behind him with a mournful and famished look, her tail between her legs, her ears flattened against her head, and stopping and starting whenever he did.

He tried to chase this skeleton away, and cried: "Run along! Get out! kss! kss!" She retreated a few steps, then sat down and waited. And when the coachman walked on she followed along behind him.

He pretended to pick up a stone. The animal ran a little farther away, but came again as soon as the man's back was turned.

Then the coachman François took pity on the beast and called her. The dog approached timidly. The man patted her protruding ribs, moved by the beast's misery, and cried: "Come! come here!" Immediately she began to wag her tail, and, feeling herself taken in, adopted, she ran along ahead of her new master.

He made her a bed on the straw in the stable, then he went to the kitchen for bread. When she had eaten all she could she curled up and went to sleep. When the masters heard of this the next day they allowed the coachman to keep the animal. It was a good beast, caressing and faithful, intelligent and gentle.

But soon they saw that she had a terrible fault. She was in love from one year's end to another. In a very short time she had made the acquaintance of all the dogs in the neighborhood, and they immediately began to roam around her day and night. She distributed her favors to them with absolute impartiality, seeming to be on the best of terms with them all, dragging behind her a regular pack, composed of the most varied types of the barking race, some as large as one's fist, others the size of donkeys. She trotted them along all the roads on endless journeys, and when she stopped to rest on the grass they would make a circle about her and watch her with their tongues hanging out.

The people of the neighborhood looked upon her as a phenomenon; they never had seen anything like it. The veterinary was at a loss. At night, when she returned to the stable, the crowd of dogs would besiege the estate. They would slip in through every break in the hedge, trample down the plots, pull up the flowers, dig holes in the ground, and generally exasperate the gardener, and they would howl all night, gathered around the building where their friend lay; and nothing could persuade them to leave.

In the daytime they would even go into the house. It was an invasion, a riot, a disaster. At all moments the masters would find on the stairs and even in their rooms little yellow terriors, pointers, bulldogs, mangy curs with neither home nor

hearth, and enormous Newfoundland dogs which frightened the children.

Then, all over the countryside, people began to see unknown dogs that had come from they knew not where, living no one knew how, and had then disappeared again.

Nevertheless, François adored Cocotte, and he kept repeating: "That beast is human. She only lacks speech."

He had a magnificent red leather collar made for her which bore these words engraved on a copper plate: "Mademoiselle Cocotte, belonging to the coachman François."

She had become enormous. She was now as fat as she had been thin. She had grown stout all of a sudden, and now walked with difficulty, like human beings that are too obese, and she would pant as soon as she attempted to run.

She showed an extraordinary fertility; four times a year she gave birth to batches of little animals belonging to every variety of the canine race. François would pick out one which he would leave her, and then unmercifully throw the others into the river. But soon the cook joined her complaints to those of the gardener. She found dogs under the stove, in the ice-box, in the coal-bin, and they stole everything they came across.

The master impatiently ordered François to get rid of Cocotte and in despair, the man tried to give her away. Nobody wanted her. Then he decided

to lose her, and he gave her to a teamster, who was to drop her on the other side of Paris, near Joinville-le-Pont.

Cocotte returned the same day. Some decision had to be taken. Five francs was given to a train conductor to take her to Havre. He was to drop her there. Three days later she returned to the stable, scratched up, harassed, and tired out.

The master took pity on her and let her stay. But the other dogs soon returned, more numerous than ever. And one evening, when there was a big dinner party, a stuffed turkey was carried away by a dog right under the cook's nose; and she did not dare to stop him.

This time the master completely lost his temper, and angrily told François: "If you don't throw this beast into the water before to-morrow morning, I'll put you out, do you hear?"

The man, dumbfounded, went to his room to pack his trunk, preferring to leave the place. Then he bethought himself that he could find no other place as long as he dragged this animal behind him; he remembered that he was well paid and well fed, and he decided that a dog was really not worth all that. At last he decided to rid himself of Cocotte at daybreak.

He slept badly. He rose at dawn, seized a strong rope, and went to get the dog. She stood up slowly, shook herself, stretched, and came to her master. Then his courage forsook him, and he began to

kiss her tenderly, petting her and calling her tender names.

But a neighboring clock struck six. He could no longer hesitate. He opened the door, calling: "Come!" The beast wagged her tail, understanding that she was to be taken out.

They reached the beach, and he chose a place where the water appeared to be deep. Then he knotted the rope around the leather collar and tied a heavy stone to the other end. He seized Cocotte in his arms and kissed her madly, as if he were taking leave of a human being. He held her to his breast, rocked her, and called her "my dear little Cocotte, my sweet little Cocotte," and she grunted with pleasure.

Ten times he tried to throw her into the water, and each time he lost courage.

But suddenly he took his decision, and he threw her as far from him as he could. At first she tried to swim, as she did when he gave her a bath, but her head, dragged down by the stone, kept going under; and she looked at her master with wild, human glances as she struggled like a drowning person. Then the front part of her body sank while her hind legs waved wildly out of the water; finally those also disappeared.

Then, for five minutes, bubbles rose to the surface; and François, haggard, his heart beating, thought he saw Cocotte struggling in the mud; and, with the simplicity of a peasant, he kept saying to

himself: "What does the poor beast think of me now?"

He almost lost his mind; he was sick for a month, and every night he dreamed of his dog; he could feel her licking his hands and hear her barking. It was necessary to call in a physician. At last he recovered, and toward the end of June his masters took him to their estate at Biessard, near Rouen.

There again he was near the Seine. He began to take baths. Each morning he went down with the groom, and they swam across the river.

One day, as they were disporting themselves in the water, François suddenly cried to his companion: "See what's coming! I'm going to give you a chop!"

It was an enormous, swollen corpse that was floating down with its feet sticking straight up in the air.

François swam up to it, still joking: "Whew! it's not fresh. What a catch, old man! It isn't thin, either!" He kept swimming around at a distance from the stupefying beast. Then suddenly he was silent and looked at it strangely; this time he came near enough to touch it. He looked fixedly at the collar, then he stretched out his arm, seized the neck, twisted the corpse around, and drew it up close to him and read on the copper, which had turned green and which still stuck to the discolored leather: "Mademoiselle Cocotte, belonging to the coachman François."

The dead dog had come more than a hundred miles to find its master!

He uttered a frightful shriek, and swam for the beach with all his might, still howling; and as soon as he touched land he ran away wildly, stark naked, through the country. He was insane!

WHO KNOWS?

GOOD God! At last I am about to write down what has happened to me. But can I? Dare I? The thing is so bizarre, so inexplicable, so incomprehensible, so silly!

If I were not perfectly sure of what I have seen, sure there was no defect in my reasoning, no error in my statements, no gap in the inflexible sequence of my observations, I should believe myself to be the dupe of a simple hallucination, the sport of a singular vision. After all, who knows?

I am now in a private asylum, but I came here voluntarily, out of prudence and fear. Only one human being knows my history, and he is the doctor of the asylum. I am going to write it down. I really do not know why. To get rid of it, for I feel as if it were an intolerable nightmare.

Let me explain. I have always been a recluse, a dreamer, a kind of isolated philosopher, easy-going, content with little, harboring ill feeling against no man, and without even a grudge against heaven. I have always lived alone, because of a kind of em-

barrassment that affects me when I find myself in the presence of others. How can this be explained? I cannot account for it. I am not averse to society, to conversation, to dining with friends, but when they are near me for any length of time, even the most intimate friends, they bore me, fatigue me, enervate me, and I experience an overwhelming, torturing desire to see them get up and leave, or to go away myself.

That desire is more than a craving; it is an irresistible necessity. And if the presence of the people with whom I find myself were to be continued, if I were compelled, not only to listen, but also to follow their conversation, for any length of time, something serious would assuredly happen to me. What would happen? Ah! who knows? Perhaps a slight paralytic stroke? Yes, probably!

I like so well to be alone that I cannot even endure to have other beings sleeping under my roof. I cannot live in Paris, because there I suffer the most constant agony. I die morally and am also the victim in body and nerves of that immense crowd which swarms around me, even when it sleeps. Ah! the sleep of others is even more painful to me than their conversation. And I can never find repose when I know, when I feel, that on the other side of a wall other existences are interrupted by these regular eclipses of intelligence.

Why am I thus? Who knows? The cause of it is perhaps very simple. I tire very soon of every-

thing outside of myself. There are many persons in similar case.

There are on earth two distinct races: those that have need of others, whom others distract, amuse, soothe, and whom solitude harasses, exhausts, overwhelms, like the ascent of a great glacier, or traversing the desert; and those, on the contrary, whom others weary, tire, bore, silently torture, while isolation calms them, soothes them with repose in their independent and fanciful imaginings. In fact, this is a normal, psychic phenomenon. Some are constituted to live a life with others, some to live a life within themselves. My attention to externals is quickly exhausted, and as soon as it reaches its limit I experience in my whole body and in my whole intelligence an intolerable discomfort.

As a result of this, I become attached, or, rather, I became much attached, to inanimate objects, which have for me the importance of living beings, and my house has become, had become, a world in which I lived an active and solitary life, surrounded by all manner of things, furniture, familiar knick-knacks, as sympathetic in my eyes as the faces of human beings. I had filled my home with them, little by little, I had adorned it with them, and I felt contented, satisfied, happy there as one might feel in the arms of a charming woman whose wonted caresses had become a soothing and delightful necessity.

I had had this house constructed in the center

of a beautiful garden, which hid it from the public highway, and which was near a city where I could always find the distractions of society, for which, at times, I had a longing. All my servants slept in a separate building, which was at considerable distance from the house, at the far end of the kitchen garden, which was surrounded by a high wall. The darkness of the nights, in the silence of my isolated dwelling, concealed, buried beneath the leaves of great trees, was so reposeful and so delicious that I lingered every evening, for several hours, in order to enjoy the solitude a little longer.

One day *Sigurd* had been played at one of the city theaters. It was the first time I had listened to that beautiful, musical, and fairy-like drama, and I had derived from it the liveliest pleasure.

I returned home on foot, with a light step, my head full of sonorous phrases, and my mind haunted by delightful visions. It was black night, so dark that I could hardly distinguish the highway, and I stumbled into the ditch more than once. From the custom-house to my house is about a mile, a leisurely walk of about twenty minutes. It was one o'clock in the morning, or maybe half-past one; the sky by this time had cleared somewhat and the waning moon appeared, in its gloomy last quarter. The first quarter of the crescent moon, which rises at five or six o'clock in the evening, is clear, gay, and with a silver sheen; but the quarter that rises after midnight is reddish, sad, and fateful; is the

true witches' moon. Every night prowler must have observed this. The first quarter, though slender as a thread, throws a faint, joyous light which rejoices the heart and outlines distinct shadows on the ground; the last quarter sheds hardly a dying glimmer, and is so wan that it causes only dim shadows.

I perceived in the distance the somber mass of my garden, and I know not why, but I was seized with a feeling of uneasiness at the idea of going indoors. I slackened my pace. The air was very mild. The thick clump of trees had the appearance of a tomb in which my house lay buried.

I opened the outer gate, and entered the long avenue of sycamores that leads up toward the house, their branches meeting overhead and forming a kind of tunnel, and I passed through thick, impenetrable masses of shrubbery and skirted lawns with flower-beds, oval patches of various indistinct hues.

On approaching the house, I was seized by a strange feeling. I stood still. Nothing could be heard. In the trees there was not even a breath of air. "What is the matter with me?" I said to myself. For ten years I had come home in the same way, without experiencing the least inquietude. I never had any fear at night. The sight of a man, a marauder or a thief, would have thrown me into a fit of rage, and I should have rushed at him without any hesitation. Moreover, I had my revolver. But I did not touch it, for I

was anxious to resist that feeling of dread that was taking possession of me.

What was it? Was it a presentiment? That mysterious presentiment which takes hold of the senses of men before they see something that, to them, is inexplicable? Perhaps? Who knows?

As I advanced, I felt shivers going through me, and when I was close to the wall near the outhouses of my residence, I felt that I must wait a few minutes before opening the door and going inside. I sat down then on a bench under the windows of my drawing-room. I rested there, a little shaky, with my head leaning against the wall, and my eyes wide open under the shade of the foliage. For the first few moments I did not observe anything unusual around me; there was a humming in my ears, but that is not unusual. Sometimes it seems to me that I hear trains passing, that I hear clocks striking, that I hear a multitude on the march.

Presently those humming sounds became more distinct, more concentrated, more recognizable. I had made a mistake. It was not the ordinary buzzing of my arteries which transmitted these rumbling sounds to my ears, but it was a very distinct, though very confused noise which came, without any doubt whatever, from the interior of my house. Through the walls I distinguished this continued noise, I should rather say agitation than noise, an indistinct moving of a pile of things, as if some-

body was surreptitiously tossing about, displacing, and carrying away all my furniture.

Yet, for some considerable time, I doubted the evidence of my hearing. But, having placed my ear against one of the outhouses, the better to discover what this strange disturbance was inside my house, I became convinced, certain, that something altogether abnormal and incomprehensible was being done there. I had no fear, but I—was—how shall I express it?—paralyzed by astonishment. I did not draw my revolver, knowing very well that there was no need of doing so.

I listened a long time, but could come to no conclusion, my mind being quite clear, though half crazy with anxiety. I stood there listening to the noise, which gradually increased, and at intervals grew so loud that it seemed to be an impatient, angry disturbance, a mysterious commotion.

Then, suddenly, ashamed of my timidity, I seized my bunch of keys, selected the one I wanted, guided it into the lock, turned it twice, and, pushing the door with all my might, sent it banging against the wall.

The collision sounded like the report of a gun, and in response to that explosive noise a formidable tumult resounded, from roof to basement of my residence. It was so sudden, so terrible, so deafening, that I recoiled a few steps, and, although I knew it to be wholly useless, I pulled my revolver out of its case.

I still waited, but only a few minutes. Now I could distinguish an extraordinary pattering upon the steps of my grand staircase, on the waxed floors, on the carpets, not of boots, nor of naked feet, but of iron, and wooden crutches, which clattered like cymbals. Then I suddenly discerned, on the threshold of my door, an armchair, my large reading easy-chair, which walked off waddling. It went away through my garden. Other chairs followed it, those of my drawing-room, then my sofas, dragging themselves along like crocodiles on their short paws; then all my chairs bounding like goats, and the little footstools hopping like rabbits.

Oh! what a sensation! I slunk back into a clump of bushes, where I remained crouching, watching, meanwhile, my furniture file past, for everything walked away, the one behind the other, briskly or slowly, according to its weight or size. My grand piano bounded past with the gallop of a horse and a murmur of music in its sides; the smaller articles crawled along the gravel like ants, my brushes, hand-mirrors, goblets, the moonlight being reflected in them like glow-worms which glistened in the moonlight. I saw my writing-desk appear, a rare curiosity of the last century, which contained all the letters I had ever received, all the history of my heart, an old history from which I have suffered so much! Inside it there were also many photographs.

Suddenly—I no longer had any fear—I threw

myself on it, seized it as one would seize a thief, as one would seize a wife about to run away; but it pursued its irresistible course, and despite my efforts, and despite my anger, I could not even retard its pace. As I was desperately resisting that insuperable force, I was thrown to the ground in my struggle with it. It then rolled me over and trailed me along the gravel, and the rest of my furniture which followed it began to march over me, trampling on my legs and injuring them. When I loosed my hold, other articles passed over my body, just as a charge of cavalry passes over the body of a dismounted soldier.

Seized at last with terror, I succeeded in dragging myself out of the main avenue, and in concealing myself again among the shrubbery, so as to watch the disappearance of the most cherished objects, the smallest, the least striking, the least known, which had once belonged to me.

I then heard, in the distance, in my house that now sounded hollow like all empty houses, a loud noise of slamming of doors. They were slammed shut from top to bottom of my dwelling, even the door which I had just opened myself, fool that I was, for this exodus, and which was the last to close. I fled then, running toward the city, and did not regain my self-composure till I reached the boulevards, where I met some belated people. I rang the bell of a hotel where I was known. I had knocked the dust off my clothes with my hands, and

I told the porter that I had lost my bunch of keys, which included also the key of the kitchen garden, where my servants slept in a house standing by itself, on the other side of the wall of the inclosure that protected my fruits and vegetables from the raids of marauders.

I covered myself up to the eyes in the bed which was assigned to me; but I could not sleep and I waited for dawn listening to the throbbing of my heart. I had given orders that my servants were to be summoned to the hotel at daybreak, and my *valet de chambre* knocked at my door at seven o'clock in the morning.

His countenance bore a woeful look.

"A great misfortune has happened during the night, Monsieur," said he.

"What is it?"

"Somebody has stolen the whole of Monsieur's furniture, all, everything, even to the smallest articles."

This news pleased me. Why? Who knows? I was complete master of myself, bent on dissimulation, resolved to tell no one of anything I had seen; determined to conceal and bury in my heart of hearts a terrible secret. I responded:

"They must be the same people that have stolen my keys. The police must be informed immediately. I am going to get up, and will rejoin you in a few moments."

The investigation into the circumstances under

which the robbery might have been committed lasted five months. Nothing was found, not even the smallest of my knicknacks, nor the least trace of the thieves. Good gracious! If I had only told them what I knew— If I had said—they would have locked me up—me, not the thieves, but the man who had seen such a thing as I described.

Oh, I knew how to keep silence! I never re-furnished my house. That would have been useless. The same thing would have occurred again. I had no desire even to re-enter the house, and I did not re-enter it; I never visited it again. I went to Paris, to the hotel, and I consulted doctors in reguard to the condition of my nerves, which had disquieted me a good deal ever since that fatal night.

They advised me to travel, and I followed their advice.

I began by making an excursion into Italy. The sunshine did me much good. For six months I wandered about from Genoa to Venice, from Venice to Florence, from Florence to Rome, from Rome to Naples. Then I traveled over Sicily, a country celebrated for its scenery and its monuments, relics left by the Greeks and the Normans. I passed over into Africa. I traversed at my ease that immense desert, yellow and tranquil, where camels, gazelles, and Arab vagabonds roam about, where, in the rare and transparant atmosphere, no ghosts hover, either by day or by night.

I returned to France by Marseilles, and in spite

of all the Provençal gayety, the diminished clearness of the sky made me sad. I experienced, in returning to the continent, the peculiar sensation of an invalid who believes himself cured, but who is warned by a dull pain that the seeds of the disease have not been eradicated.

I then returned to Paris and at the end of a month I was dejected. It was autumn, and I wished, before the approach of winter, to make an excursion through Normandy, a country with which I was unfamiliar.

I began my journey with Rouen, and for eight days wandered about, charmed, captivated, enthusiastic, in that city of the middle ages, in that astounding museum of remarkable Gothic monuments.

But, one afternoon, about four o'clock, as I was sauntering slowly through a seemingly unattractive street, through which runs a stream as black as ink called "Eau de Robec," my attention, fixed for the moment on the quaint appearance of some of the houses, was suddenly attracted by a row of second-hand-furniture shops.

Ah! they had carefully chosen their locality, these sordid traffickers in antiquities, in that quaint little street, overlooking that sinister stream of water, beneath those gables of tile and slate on which still revolved the weathercocks of bygone days.

At the farther end of these dingy shops were piled up carved chests, Rouen, Sèvres, and Mous-

tiers china, painted statues, others of oak, Christs, Virgins, saints, church ornaments, chasubles, capes, even sacred vases, and an old gilded wooden tabernacle whence God had departed. Oh! What singular caverns are in those lofty houses, crowded with objects of every description, whose existence seems to be ended, things that have survived their original possessors, their century, their times, their fashion, and are now bought as curiosities by new generations!

My affection for bibelots was awakened in that city of antiquaries. I went from shop to shop, crossing, in two strides, the rotten four-plank bridges thrown over the nauseous current of the Eau de Robec.

Heaven protect me! What a shock! I saw one of my most beautiful wardrobes at the entrance to an archway, which was crowded with articles of every description and seemed to be the entrance to catacombs for ancient furniture. I approached my wardrobe, trembling to such an extent that I dared not touch it. I put forth my hand, I hesitated. It was indeed my wardrobe, nevertheless; a unique wardrobe of the time of Louis XIII, recognizable by anyone who had seen it once. Casting my eyes a little farther, toward the more somber depths of this corridor, I perceived three of my tapestry-covered chairs; and farther on still, my two Henry II tables, such rare treasures that people came all the way from Paris to see them.

I advanced, haltingly, quivering with emotion, as a knight of the middle ages would enter an enchanted cave. I found, at every step, something that belonged to me—my brushes, my books, my pictures, my draperies, my firearms, everything, except the writing-desk full of my letters, and that I could not discover.

I walked on, descending dark passages, in order to ascend again to the floors above. I called out, nobody answered. There was no one in that house —a house as vast and tortuous as a labyrinth.

Night came on, and I was obliged to sit down in the darkness on one of my own chairs, for I had no desire to go away. From time to time I shouted, "Hello, hello, somebody!"

I had sat there more than an hour when I heard steps soft and slow, I knew not where. Bracing myself up, I called out again, whereupon I perceived a glimmer of light in the adjoining room.

"Who is there?" said a voice.

"A buyer," I responded.

"It is pretty late to come into a shop in that manner."

"I have been waiting for you more than an hour," I answered.

"You can come back to-morrow."

"To-morrow I shall have left Rouen."

I dared not advance, and he did not come to me. I still saw the glimmer of his light, which shone on a tapestry on which were two angels flying over

the dead on a battlefield. That also belonged to me. I said:

"Well, are you coming?"

"I am at your service," he answered.

I got up and went toward him.

Standing in the center of a large room was a little man, very short and phenomenally fat, a hideous object.

He had a singular beard of straggling yellowish hair, and not a hair on his head.

As he held his candle aloft at arm's length in order to see me, his cranium appeared to me to resemble a little moon, in that vast chamber encumbered with old furniture. His features were wrinkled and puffy, and his eyes could not be seen.

I bought three chairs that belonged to me, and paid at once a large sum for them, giving him merely the number of my room at the hotel. They were to be delivered before nine o'clock the next day.

I then left, he conducting me, with much politeness, as far as the door.

I immediately repaired to the chief commissary of police, to whom I told the story of the robbery of my furniture and of the discovery I had made. He required time to telegraph for information to the authorities who originally had charge of the case, and asked me to wait in his office until he received a reply. An hour later, the answer came, and it bore out my statements.

"I am going to arrest and interrogate this man

at once," he said to me, "for he may have conceived a suspicion, and smuggled away what belongs to you. Will you go and dine, and return in two hours? I shall then have the man here, and I will subject him to a fresh interrogation in your presence."

"Most gladly, Monsieur. I thank you with all my heart."

I went to dine at my hotel and ate better than I could have believed possible. I was quite happy now; "they've got him," I thought.

Two hours later I returned to the office of the police functionary, who was waiting for me.

"Well, Monsieur," said he, "we have not been able to find your man. My agents cannot put their hands on him."

"Ah!" I felt myself sinking. "But—you have at least found his house?" I asked.

"Yes, certainly; and what is more, it is now being watched and guarded until his return. As for him, he has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, disappeared. He ordinarily passes his evenings at the house of a female neighbor, who is also a furniture broker, a queer kind of sorceress, the Widow Bidoin. She has not seen him this evening and cannot give any information in regard to him. We must wait until to-morrow."

I slept so badly that night that I had fits of nightmare.

As I did not wish to appear too restless or eager, I waited till ten o'clock the next day before reporting to the police. The merchant had not reappeared. His shop remained closed. The commissary said to me:

"I have taken all the necessary steps. The court has been made acquainted with the affair. We will go together to that shop and have it opened, and you shall point out to me all that belongs to you."

We drove there in a cab. Police officers were stationed at the building with a locksmith, and the door of the shop was soon opened.

On entering, I could not discover my wardrobe, my chairs, my tables; I saw nothing, nothing of that which had furnished my house, no, nothing, although on the previous evening I could not take a step without encountering something that belonged to me.

The chief commissary, much astonished, regarded me at first with suspicion.

"My God, Monsieur," said I, "the disappearance of these articles of furniture coincides strangely with that of the merchant."

He laughed.

"That is true. You did wrong in buying and paying for the articles that were your own property yesterday. It was that that gave him the cue."

"What seems to me incomprehensible," I replied, "is that all the places that were occupied by my furniture are now filled by other furniture."

"Oh!" responded the commissary, "he has had all night, and has no doubt been assisted by accomplices. This house must communicate with the adjoining houses. But have no fear, Monsieur; I will have the affair promptly and thoroughly investigated. The brigand can not long escape us, as we are in charge of his den.

Ah! My heart, my heart, my poor heart, how it beat!

I remained a fortnight at Rouen. The man did not return. Good heavens! That man, what was it that could have frightened or surprised him? But on the sixteenth day, early in the morning, I received from my gardener, now the keeper of my empty and pillaged house, the following strange letter:

"MONSIEUR: I have the honor to inform Monsieur that nobody can understand, and the police no more than the rest of us. The whole of the furniture has been returned, not one piece is missing—everything is in its place, up to the very smallest article. The house is now the same in every respect that it was before the robbery took place. It is enough to make one lose one's head. The thing took place in the night between Friday and Saturday. The roads are torn up as if everything had been dragged along from the gate to the house to the door. The same thing was observed the day after the disappearance of the furniture.

"We are anxiously expecting Monsieur, whose very humble and obedient servant I am,

"PHILIPPE RAUDIN."

"Ah, no, no! I shall never return there."

I took the letter to the commissary of police.

"It is a very clever restitution," said he. "Let us say nothing about it. We shall nip the man one of these days."

But he never has been nipped. And I am afraid of him now, as if he were a ferocious animal let loose behind me.

Not to be found! Not to be found, this monster with the moon skull. They never will find him. He never will return to his shop. What does he care? I am the only one who may meet him, and I do not wish to do so.

I do not wish it! I do not wish it! I do not wish it! And if he returns, if he takes possession of his shop, who is to prove that my furniture was on his premises? There is only my testimony against him; and I feel that that is not above suspicion.

Ah! no! That kind of existence was no longer possible. I was not able to keep the secret of what I had witnessed. I could not continue to live like the rest of the world, with the fear upon me that those scenes might be re-enacted.

I came to consult the doctor who directs this lunatic asylum, and I told him everything.

After he had interrogated me for a long time, he said:

"Will you consent, Monsieur, to remain here for some time?"

"Most willingly, Monsieur."

"You have some means?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Will you have isolated apartments?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Would you care to receive any friends?"

"No, Monsieur, nobody. The man from Rouen might take it into his head to pursue me here to be revenged on me."

And I have been alone, alone, all, all alone, for three months. I am growing tranquil by degrees. I have no longer any fears. If the antiquary should become insane—and if he should be brought into this asylum! Even prisons are not places of safety.

BOITELLE

FATHER BOITELLE (Antoine) made a specialty of undertaking dirty jobs all through the countryside. Whenever there was a ditch or a cesspool to be cleaned out, a dunghill removed, a sewer cleansed, or any dirt-hole whatever, he was employed to do it.

He would come with the instruments of his trade, his sabots covered with dirt, and set to work, complaining incessantly about his occupation. When anyone asked him then why he did this loathsome work, he would reply resignedly:

"Faith, 'tis for my children, whom I must support. This brings me in more than anything else."

He had fourteen children. If anyone asked him what had become of them, he would say with an air of indifference:

"Only eight of them are left in the house. One is out at service, and five are married."

When the questioner wanted to know whether they were well married, he replied vivaciously:

"I did not oppose them. I opposed them in

nothing. They married as they pleased. We shouldn't go against people's likings; it turns out badly. I am a night scavenger because my parents went against my likings. But for that I should have become a workman like the others."

This is the way his parents had thwarted him in his likings:

He was a soldier stationed at Havre, not more stupid than another, nor sharper either, a rather simple fellow, however. When he was not on duty, his greatest pleasure was to walk along the quay, where the bird-dealers congregate. Sometimes alone, sometimes with a soldier from his own part of the country, he would slowly saunter along by cages containing parrots with green backs and yellow heads from the banks of the Amazon, or parrots with gray backs and red heads from Senegal, or enormous macaws, which look like birds reared in hot-houses, with their flower-like feathers, their plumes, and their tufts. Parrots of every size which appeared to be painted with minute care by the miniaturist, God Almighty, and the little birds, all the smaller birds, hopped about, yellow, blue, and variegated, mingling their cries with the noise of the quay, and adding to the din caused by unloading the vessels, as well as by passengers and vehicles, a violent clamor, loud, shrill, and deafening, as if from monsters in a distant forest.

Boitelle would pause, with wondering eyes and open mouth, laughing and enraptured, show-

ing his teeth to the captive cockatoos, which kept nodding their white or yellow topknots toward the glaring red of his breeches and the copper buckle of his belt. When he found a bird that could talk, he put questions to it, and if it happened at the time to be disposed to hold a conversation with him he would carry away enough amusement to last him till evening. He also found plentiful amusement in looking at the monkeys, and could conceive no greater luxury for a rich man than to possess these animals, just like cats and dogs. This kind of taste for the exotic was in his blood, as people have a taste for the chase, or for medicine, or for the priesthood. He could not help returning to the quay every time the gates of the barracks opened, drawn thither by an irresistible longing.

On one occasion, having paused almost in ecstasy before an enormous macaw, which was swelling out its plumes, bending forward, and bridling up again as if making the court curtseys of parrot-land, he saw the door of a little café adjoining the bird-dealer's shop open, and a young negress appeared, wearing on her head a red silk handkerchief. She was sweeping into the street the corks and sand of the establishment.

Boitelle's attention was soon divided between the bird and the woman, and he really could not tell which of these two beings he contemplated with the greater astonishment and delight.

The negress, having swept the rubbish into the

street, raised her eyes, and, in her turn, was dazzled by the soldier's uniform. There she stood facing him with her broom in her hands as if she were bringing him a rifle, while the macaw continued bowing. But after a few seconds the soldier began to feel embarrassed at this attention, and he walked away quietly so as not to look as if he were beating a retreat.

But he came back. Almost every day he passed before the Café des Colonies, and often he could distinguish through the window the figure of the little black-skinned maid serving "bocks" or glasses of brandy to the sailors of the port. Frequently, too, she would come out to the door on seeing him; soon, without even having exchanged a word, they smiled at each other like acquaintances; and Boitelle felt his heart touched when he suddenly saw, glittering between the dark lips of the girl, a shining row of white teeth. At last, one day he ventured to enter, and was surprised to find that she could speak French like every one else. The bottle of lemonade, of which she was good enough to accept a glassful, remained in the soldier's recollection memorably delicious, and it became a custom with him to come and absorb in this little tavern on the quay all the agreeable drinks that he could afford.

For him it was a treat, a happiness, on which his thoughts dwelt constantly, to watch the black hand of the little maid pouring something into his glass

while her teeth laughed more than her eyes. At the end of two months they became fast friends, and Boitelle, after his first astonishment, at discovering that this negress had as good principles as honest French girls, that she exhibited a regard for economy, industry, religion, and good conduct, loved her more on that account, and was so charmed with her that he desired to marry her.

He told her his intentions, which made her dance with joy. She had a little money left her by a female oyster-dealer, who had picked her up when she had been left on the quay at Havre by an American captain. This captain had found her, when she was about six years old, lying on bales of cotton in the hold of his ship, some hours after his departure from New York. On his arrival in Havre he abandoned to the care of the compassionate oyster-dealer the little black creature, who had been hidden on board his vessel, he knew not why or by whom.

Then the oyster dealer died, and the young negress became a servant at the Colonial tavern.

Antoine Boitelle added: "This will be all right if my parents don't oppose it. I never will go against them, you understand, never! I'm going to say a word or two to them the first time I go back to the country."

In the following week, having obtained twenty-four hours' leave, he went to see his family, who cultivated a little farm at Tourteville, near Yvetot.

He waited till the meal was finished, the hour when the coffee with brandy in it makes people more open-hearted, before informing his parents that he had found a girl who satisfied all his tastes so completely that there could not exist any other in all the world so perfectly suited to him.

The old people, on hearing this, immediately assumed a cautious manner, and asked for explanations. He concealed from them nothing except the color of her skin.

She was a servant, without much means, but strong, thrifty, clean, well-conducted, and sensible. All these things were better than money would be in the hands of a bad housewife. Moreover, she had a few sous, left her by a woman who had reared her, a good number of sous, almost a little dowry, fifteen hundred francs in the savings bank. The old people, persuaded by his talk, and relying also on their own judgment, were gradually weakening, when he came to the delicate point. Laughing in rather a constrained fashion, he said:

"There's only one thing you may not like. She is not a white slip."

They did not understand, and he had to explain at some length and very cautiously, to avoid shocking them, that she belonged to the dusky race of which they had seen samples only in pictures at Epinal. Then they became restless, perplexed, alarmed, as if he had proposed a union with the devil.

The mother said: "Black? How much of her is black? Is the whole of her?"

He replied: "Certainly. Everywhere, just as you are white everywhere."

The father exclaimed: "Black! Is it as black as the pot?"

The son answered: "Perhaps a little less than that. She is black, but not disgustingly black. The priest's cassock is black; but it is not uglier than a surplice, which is white."

The father said: "Are there more black people besides her in her country?"

And the son, with an air of conviction, exclaimed: "Certainly!"

But the old man shook his head.

"That must be unpleasant."

"It isn't more disagreeable than anything else when you get accustomed to it," said the son.

"It doesn't soil the underwear more than other skins, this black skin?" the mother asked.

"Not more than your own, as it is her proper color."

Then, after many other questions, it was agreed that the parents should see this girl before coming to any decision, and that the young fellow, whose term of military service would be over in a month, should bring her to the house in order that they might examine her and decide whether or not she was too dark to enter the Boitelle family.

Antoine accordingly announced that on Sunday,

the 22nd of May, the day of his discharge, he would set out for Tourteville with his sweetheart.

For this journey to the house of her lover's parents, she had put on her most beautiful and most gaudy clothes, in which yellow, red, and blue were the prevailing colors, so that she looked as if she were adorned for a national festival.

At the terminus, as they were leaving Havre, people stared at her, and Boitelle was proud of giving his arm to a person who commanded so much attention. Then, in the third-class carriage, in which she took a seat by his side, she aroused so much astonishment among the country folk that the people in the adjoining compartments stood on their benches to look at her over the wooden partition. A child, at sight of her, began to cry with terror, another concealed his face in his mother's apron. Everything went off well, however, up to their arrival at their destination. But, when the train slowed up as they drew near Yvetot, Antoine felt ill at ease, as he would have felt at a review when he did not know his drill practice. Then, as he put his head out, he recognized in the distance his father, holding the bridle of the horse harnessed to a carryall, and his mother, who had come forward to the latticed partition behind which stood those who were expecting friends.

He alighted first, gave his hand to his sweetheart, and, holding himself erect, as if he were escorting a general, he went to meet his family.

The mother, on seeing this black girl in variegated costume in her son's company, remained so stupefied that she could not speak; and the father found it hard to hold the horse, which the engine or the negress caused to rear continuously. But Antoine, suddenly filled with unmixed joy at seeing the old people once more, rushed forward with open arms, embraced his mother, embraced his father, in spite of the nag's fright, and then turning toward his companion, at whom the passengers on the platform stopped to stare with amazement, he proceeded to explain:

"Here she is! I told you that, at first sight, she is not attractive; but as soon as you know her, I can assure you there's not a better girl in the whole world. Say good morning to her, so that she may not feel badly."

Thereupon Mère Boitelle, almost frightened out of her wits, made a sort of curtsey, while the father took off his cap, murmuring:

"I wish you good luck!"

"Then, without further delay, they climbed into the carryall, the two women at the back on seats that made them jump up and down as the vehicle went jolting along the road, and the two men on the front seat.

Nobody spoke. Antoine, ill at ease, whistled a barrack-room air; his father whipped the nag; and his mother, from her corner, kept casting sly glances at the negress, whose forehead and cheekbones

shone in the sunlight like well-polished new shoes.

Wishing to break the ice, Antoine turned round.

"Well," said he, "we don't seem inclined to talk."

"We must have time," replied the old woman.

He continued:

"Come! Tell us the little story about that hen of yours that laid eight eggs."

It was a funny anecdote of long standing in the family. But, as his mother still remained silent, paralyzed by her emotion, he himself undertook to tell the story, laughing at the memorable incident. The father, who knew it by heart, brightened at the opening words of the narrative; his wife soon followed his example; and the negress herself, when he reached the drollest part of it, suddenly gave vent to a laugh, such a loud, rolling torrent of laughter that the horse, becoming excited, broke into a gallop.

This served to begin their acquaintance, and they all began to chat.

They had hardly reached the house and alighted, when Antoine conducted his sweetheart to a room, so that she might take off her dress, to avoid staining it, as she was going to prepare a nice dish, intended to win the old people's affections through their stomachs. He drew his parents outside the house, and, with beating heart, asked:

"Well, what do you say now?"

The father said nothing. The mother exclaimed:

"She is too black! No, indeed, this is too much for me. It turns my blood."

"You will get used to it," said Antoine.

"Perhaps so, but not at first."

They went into the house, where the good woman was somewhat affected at the spectacle of the negress engaged in cooking. She at once proceeded to assist her, with petticoats tucked up, active in spite of her age.

The meal was excellent, very long and very enjoyable. When they were taking a turn after dinner, Antoine took his father aside to talk with him privately.

"Well, father, what do you say about it?"

The peasant took care not to compromise himself.

"I have no opinion about it. Ask your mother."

So Antoine went back to his mother, and, detaining her behind the rest, said:

"Well, mother, what do you think of her?"

"My poor lad, she is really too black. If she were only a little less black, I would not go against you, but this is too much. One would think it was Satan!"

He did not press her, knowing how obstinate his mother had always been, but he felt a tempest of disappointment sweeping over his heart. He was considering what he ought to do, what plan he could devise, surprised, moreover, that she had not conquered them already as she had captivated himself. And they all four walked along through

the wheat-fields, having gradually relapsed into silence. Whenever they passed a fence they saw a countryman sitting on the stile, and a group of brats climbed up to stare at them, and every one rushed out into the road to see the "black" whom young Boitelle had brought home with him. At a distance they noticed people scampering across the fields, just as when the drum beats to draw public attention to some living phenomenon. Father and Mother Boitelle, alarmed at this curiosity, which was exhibited everywhere through the country at their approach, quickened their pace, walking side by side, and leaving their son far behind. His dark companion asked what his parents thought of her.

He hesitatingly replied that they had not yet made up their minds.

But on the village green people rushed out of all the houses in a flutter of excitement; and, at the sight of the gathering crowd, old Boitelle took to his heels, and regained his abode, while Antoine, swelling with rage, his sweetheart on his arm, advanced majestically under the staring eyes, which opened wide in amazement.

He understood that all was finished, there was no hope for him, he could not marry his negress. She also understood it; and as they drew near the farmhouse they both began to weep. As soon as they had reached the house, she once more took off her dress to aid the mother in the household duties, and followed her everywhere, to the dairy, to the

stable, to the hen-house, taking on herself the hardest part of the work, repeating always: "Let me do it, Madame Boitelle," so that, when night came on, the old woman, touched but inexorable, said to her son: "She is a good girl, all the same. It's a pity she is so black; but indeed she is too black. I could not get used to it. She must go back again. She is too, too black!"

And young Boitelle said to his sweetheart:

"She will not consent. She thinks you are too black. You must go back again. I will go with you to the train. No matter—don't fret. I am going to talk to them after you have gone."

He then took her to the railway station, still cheering her with hope, and, when he had kissed her, he put her into the train, which he watched as it passed out of sight, his eyes swollen with tears.

In vain did he appeal to the old people. They never would give their consent.

And when he had told this story, which was known all over the country, Boitelle would add:

"From that time I have had no heart for anything. No trade suited me any longer, and so I became what I am—a night scavenger."

People would say to him: "Yet you married."

"Yes, and I can't say that my wife didn't please me, seeing that I have fourteen children; but she is not the other one, oh, no—certainly not! The other one, mark you, my negress, she had only to give me one glance, and I felt myself in Heaven."

UNCLE JULES

A WHITE-HAIRED old man asked for alms. My companion, Joseph Davranche, who gave him five francs, noticed my surprised look and said:

"That poor unfortunate reminds me of a story that I will tell you, the memory of which continually pursues me. Here it is:

"My family, which came originally from Havre, was not rich. We just managed to make both ends meet. My father worked hard, came home late from the office, and earned very little. I had two sisters.

"My mother suffered a good deal from our reduced position, and she often had harsh words for her husband, veiled and sly reproaches. The poor man then had a gesture which used to distress me. Without answering he would pass his open hand over his forehead, as if to wipe away a perspiration that did not exist. I felt his helpless suffering. We economized on everything, and never would accept an invitation to dinner, so as not to have to

return the courtesy. All our provisions were bought at bargain sales. My sisters made their own dresses, and long discussions would arise on the price of a piece of braid worth fifteen centimes a meter. Our meals usually consisted of soup and beef prepared with every kind of sauce. It seems that that is healthful and nourishing, but I should have preferred something else.

"I used to go through terrible scenes on account of lost buttons and torn trousers.

"Every Sunday, dressed in our best, we took our walk along the breakwater. My father, in a frock-coat, high hat, and kid gloves, would offer his arm to my mother, decked out and beribboned like a ship on a holiday. My sisters, who were always ready first, would await the signal for leaving; but at the last minute someone always found a spot on my father's frock-coat, and it had to be wiped away with a rag moistened with benzine.

"My father, in his shirt-sleeves, his silk hat on his head, awaited the completion of the operation, while my mother, putting on her spectacles and taking off her gloves in order not to soil them, made haste.

"We always started out ceremoniously, my sisters marching ahead, arm in arm. They were of marriageable age and had to be shown. I walked at the left of my mother, and my father at her right. I remember the pompous air of my poor parents in these Sunday strolls, their severe expression, their

stiff walk. They advanced slowly, with a serious expression, their bodies straight, their legs stiff, as if something of extreme importance depended upon their appearance.

"Every Sunday, when the big steamers were returning from unknown and distant countries, my father invariably pronounced the same words:

" 'What a surprise it would be if Jules were on that one! Eh?'

"My Uncle Jules, my father's brother, was the only hope of the family, after being its only fear. I had heard about him since childhood, and it seemed to me that I should recognize him immediately, knowing as much about him as I did. I knew every detail of his life up to the day of his departure for America, although that period of his life was always mentioned in hushed tones.

"It seems that he had behaved badly, that is to say, he had squandered a little money, which action, in a poor family, is one of the greatest crimes. With rich people, a man who amuses himself 'sows his oats.' He is smilingly called a 'sport.' Among needy families, a boy who forces his parents to break into the capital becomes a good-for-nothing, a rascal, a scamp. And this distinction is just, although the action be the same, for consequences alone determine the seriousness of the act.

"Well, Uncle Jules had visibly diminished the inheritance on which my father counted, after he had swallowed his own to the last penny. Then, ac-

cording to the custom of the times, he had been shipped off to America on a freighter going from Havre to New York.

"Once there, my uncle began to sell something or other, and he soon wrote that he was making a little money and that he soon hoped to be able to indemnify my father for his losses. This letter caused a profound emotion in the family. Jules, who had not been worth his salt, suddenly became a good man, a kind-hearted fellow, true and honest like all the Davranches.

"One of the captains told us that he had rented a large store and was doing an important business.

"Two years later a second letter came, saying: 'My dear Philippe, I am writing to tell you not to worry about my health, which is excellent. Business is good. I leave to-morrow for a long trip to South America. I may be away for several years without sending you any news. If I shouldn't write, don't worry. When my fortune is made I shall return to Havre. I hope it will not be too long and that we shall live happily together.'

"This letter had become the gospel of the family. It was read on the slightest provocation, and it was shown to everybody.

"For ten years nothing was heard from Uncle Jules; but as time went on my father's hope grew; and my mother often said:

" 'When that good Jules is here things will be different. There is one who knew how to get on!'

"And every Sunday, while watching the big steamers approaching from the horizon and pouring out a stream of smoke, my father would repeat:

" 'What a surprise it would be if Jules were on that one! Eh?'

"We almost expected to see him waving his handkerchief and crying: 'Hey! Philippe!'

"Thousands of schemes had been planned on the strength of this return; we were even to buy a house with my uncle's money, a little place in the country near Ingouville. In fact, I am not sure that my father had not already begun negotiations.

"My eldest sister was twenty-eight, the other twenty-six. They were not married, and that was a great grief for every one.

"At last a suitor presented himself for the younger one. He was a clerk, not rich, but honorable. I have always been morally certain that Uncle Jules' letter, which was shown to him one evening, had ended the young man's hesitation and definitely decided him.

"He was eagerly accepted, and it was arranged that after the wedding the whole family should take a trip to Jersey.

"Jersey is the ideal trip for poor people. It is not far; one crosses a strip of sea in a steamer and lands on foreign soil, as this little island belongs to England. Thus a Frenchman, with a two-hours' sail, can observe a neighboring people at home, and study their customs.

"This trip to Jersey completely absorbed us.

"At last we left. I see it as plainly as if it had happened yesterday. The boat was getting up steam against the quay of Granville; my father, bewildered, was superintending the loading of our three pieces of baggage; my mother, nervous, had taken the arm of my unmarried sister, who seemed lost since the departure of the other one, like the last chicken of a brood; behind us came the bride and groom, who always stayed behind, a thing which often made me turn around.

"The boat whistled. We got on board, and the vessel leaving the breakwater, forged ahead through a sea as flat as a slab of marble. We were watching the shores disappeared in the distance, happy and proud, like all who do not travel much.

"My father was extending his stomach to the breezes, under his frock-coat, which that morning had been very carefully cleaned, and he spread around him that odor of benzine which made me think of Sunday. Suddenly he noticed two elegantly dressed ladies, to whom two gentlemen were offering some oysters. An old, ragged sailor was opening them with his knife and passing them to the gentlemen, who then held them out to the ladies. They ate them in a dainty manner, holding the shell on a fine handkerchief and advancing their mouths a little in order not to spot their dresses. Then they drank the water with a rapid little motion and threw the shell over-board.

"My father was probably pleased with this delicate manner of eating oysters on a moving ship. He found that genteel and refined, and going up to my mother and sisters, he asked:

" 'Would you like me to offer you some oysters?'

"My mother hesitated on account of the expense, but my two sisters immediately accepted. My mother said, in a displeased tone:

" 'I am afraid they will hurt my stomach. Offer the children some, but not too much; it would make them sick.' Then, turning to me, she added:

" 'As for Joseph, he doesn't need any. Boys shouldn't be spoiled.'

"Therefore I remained beside my mother, finding this distinction unjust. I watched my father as he pompously conducted my two sisters and his son-in-law toward the ragged old sailor.

"The two ladies had just left, and my father showed my sisters how to eat oysters without spilling the water. He even tried to give them an example, and he seized an oyster. He tried to imitate the ladies and immediately spilled all the liquid over his coat. I heard my mother mutter:

" 'He would do far better to keep still.'

"But suddenly my father appeared to be worried; he retreated a few steps, stared at his family gathered around the old shell-opener, and quickly came toward me. He seemed very pale, with a peculiar look. In a low voice he said to my mother:

" 'It's extraordinary how that man opening the oysters looks like Jules.'

"Astonished, my mother asked:

" 'What Jules?'

"My father continued:

" 'Why—my brother. If I did not know that he was well off in America I should think it was he.'

"Bewildered, my mother stammered:

" 'You are crazy! As long as you know that it is not he, why do you say such foolish things?'

"But my father insisted:

" 'Go over and see, Clarisse! I would rather have you see with your own eyes.'

"She arose and walked to her daughters. I, too, was watching the man. He was old, dirty, wrinkled, and did not lift his eyes from his work.

"My mother returned. I noticed that she was trembling. She exclaimed quickly:

" 'I believe that it is he. Why don't you ask the captain? But be very careful that we don't have this rogue on our hands again!'

"My father walked away, but I followed him. I felt strangely moved.

"The captain, a tall, thin man, with blond whiskers, was walking along the bridge with an important air as if he were commanding the Indian mail.

"My father addressed him ceremoniously, and questioned him about his profession, adding many compliments: What might be the importance of Germany? What did it produce? What was the population? The customs? The nature of the soil? At last he said:

" 'You have there an old shell-opener who seems quite interesting. Do you know anything about him?'

"The captain, whom this conversation began to weary, answered dryly:

" 'He is some old French tramp whom I found last year in America, and I brought him back. It seems that he has relatives in Havre, but that he doesn't wish to return to them, because he owes them money. His name is Jules—Jules Darmanche or Darvanche or something like that. It seems that he was once rich over there, but you can see what's left of him now.'

"My father turned ashen and muttered, his throat contracted, his eyes haggard:

" 'Ah! ah! very well—very well—I'm not in the least surprised— Thank you very much, Captain.'

"He went away, and the astonished sailor watched him disappear. He returned to my mother so upset that she said to him:

" 'Sit down; someone will notice that something is the matter.'

"He sank down on a bench, stammering:

" 'It's he! It's he!'

"Then he asked: 'What are we going to do?'

"She answered quickly:

" 'We must get the children out of the way. Since Joseph knows everything, he can go get them. We must take good care that our son-in-law doesn't find us out.'

"My father seemed absolutely bewildered. He murmured:

" 'What a catastrophe!'

"Suddenly growing furious, my mother exclaimed:

" 'I always thought that thief would never do anything, and that he would drop down on us again! As if one could expect anything from a Davranche!'

"My father passed his hand over his forehead, as he always did when his wife reproached him. She added:

" 'Give Joseph some money, so that he can pay for the oysters. All we should need to cap the climax would be to be recognized by that beggar. That would be very pleasant! Let's get down to the other end of the boat, and take care that that man doesn't come near us!'

"They gave me five francs and walked away.

"Astonished, my sisters were awaiting their father. I said that mamma had felt a sudden attack of seasickness, and I asked the shell-opener:

" 'How much do we owe you, Monsieur?'

"I felt like laughing; he was my uncle! He answered:

" 'Two francs fifty.'

"I held out my five francs, and he returned the change. I looked at his hand; it was a poor, wrinkled sailor's hand, and I looked at his face, an unhappy old face. I said to myself:

"That is my uncle, the brother of my father."

"I gave him a ten-cent tip. He thanked me:

" 'God bless you, my young sir!'

"He spoke like a poor man receiving alms. I couldn't help thinking that he must have begged over there. My sisters looked at me, surprised at my generosity. When I returned the two francs to my father, surprised, my mother asked me:

" 'Was there three francs' worth? Impossible!'

"I said in a firm voice: 'I gave ten cents as a tip.'

"My mother started, and staring at me, she exclaimed:

" 'You must be crazy! Give ten cents to that man, to that vagabond!'

"She stopped at a look from my father, who was pointing at his son-in-law. Then everybody was silent.

"Before us, on the distant horizon, a purple shadow appeared to rise out of the sea. It was Jersey.

"When we approached the breakwater a violent desire seized me once more to see my Uncle Jules, to be near him, to tell him something consoling, something tender. But as no one was eating any more oysters, the poor unfortunate had disappeared, having probably gone below to the dirty hole where he lived."

THE HAND

THE guests all were crowding around Monsieur Bermutier, the Judge, who was rendering his opinion on the Saint-Cloud mystery. For a month this inexplicable crime had been the talk of Paris, but nobody could make head or tail of it.

Monsieur Bermutier, standing with his back to the fireplace, was citing the evidence and discussing the various theories, but arriving at no conclusion.

Some women had risen and were standing with their eyes fastened on the clean-shaven face of the Judge, who was saying such weighty things. They were shaking and trembling, moved by fear and curiosity, and by the eager and insatiable desire for the horrible, which haunts the soul of every woman. One of them, paler than the others, said during a pause:

"It's terrible. It verges on the supernatural. The truth never will be known."

The Judge turned to her:

"True, Madame, it is likely that the actual facts never will be discovered. As for the word 'super-

natural' which you have just used, it has nothing to do with the matter. We are in the presence of a very cleverly conceived and executed crime, so well enshrouded in mystery that we cannot disentangle it from the involved circumstances that surround it. But once I had to take charge of an affair in which the uncanny seemed to play a part. In fact, the case became so confused that it had to be given up."

Several women exclaimed at once:

"Oh! Tell us about it!"

Monsieur Bermutier smiled in a dignified manner, as a judge should, and continued:

"Do you think, however, that for one minute I ascribed anything in the case to supernatural influences. I believe only in normal causes. But if, instead of using the word 'supernatural' to express what we do not understand, we were simply to make use of the word 'inexplicable,' it would be much better. At any rate, in the affair of which I am about to tell you, it was especially the preliminary circumstances that impressed me. Here are the facts:

"At that time I was a judge at Ajaccio, a little white city on the edge of a bay that is surrounded by high mountains.

"The majority of the cases that came before me concerned vendettas. Some of these are superb, dramatic, ferocious, heroic. We find there the most beautiful causes for revenge of which one

could dream; enmities hundreds of years old, quieted for a time, but never extinguished; abominable stratagems, murders becoming massacres and almost deeds of glory. For two years I heard of nothing but the price of blood, of this terrible Corsican prejudice which compels revenge for insults meted out to the offending person and all his descendants and relatives. I had seen old men, children, cousins murdered; my head was full of these stories.

"One day I learned that an Englishman had just hired a little villa at the end of the bay for several years. He brought with him a French servant, whom he had engaged at Marseilles.

"Soon this peculiar person, living alone, only going out to hunt and fish, aroused a widespread interest. He never spoke to any one, never went to the town, and every morning practised about an hour with his revolver and rifle.

"Legends were built up around him. It was said that he was a high personage, fleeing from his fatherland for political reasons; then it was affirmed that he was in hiding after committing an abominable crime. Some particularly horrible circumstances were even mentioned.

"In my judicial position I thought it necessary to get some information about this man, but it was impossible to learn anything. He called himself Sir John Rowell.

"I therefore had to be satisfied with watching him

as closely as I could, but saw nothing suspicious about his actions.

"However, as rumors about him were growing and becoming more widespread, I decided to try to see this stranger myself, and I began to hunt regularly in the neighborhood of his grounds.

"For a long time I watched without finding an opportunity. At last it came to me in the shape of a partridge, which I shot and killed right in front of the Englishman. My dog fetched it for me, but, taking the bird, I went at once to Sir John Rowell and, begging his pardon, asked him to accept it.

"He was a big man, with red hair and beard, very tall, very broad, a kind of calm and polite Hercules. He had nothing of the so-called British stiffness, and in a broad English accent he thanked me warmly for my attention. At the end of a month we had had five or six conversations.

"One night, at last, as I was passing before his door, I saw him in the garden, seated astride a chair, smoking his pipe. I bowed, and he invited me to come in and have a glass of beer. I needed no urging.

"He received me with the most punctilious English courtesy, sang the praises of France and of Corsica, and declared that he was in love with this country.

"Then, with great caution and under the guise of a vivid interest, I asked him a few questions about his life and his plans. He answered without

embarrassment, telling me that he had traveled a great deal in Africa, in the Indies, in America. He added, laughing:

" 'I have had many adventures.'

"Then I turned the conversation on hunting, and he gave me curious details on hunting the hippopotamus, the tiger, the elephant and even the gorilla.

"I said:

" 'Are all these animals dangerous?'

"He smiled:

" 'Oh, no! Man is the worst.'

"And he laughed a good broad laugh, the wholesome laugh of a contented Englishman.

" 'I have also frequently been man-hunting.'

"Then he began to talk about weapons, and he invited me to come in and see different makes of guns.

His parlor was draped in black—black silk embroidered in gold. Big yellow flowers, as brilliant as fire, were worked on the dark material.

"He said:

" 'It is a Japanese material.'

"But in the middle of the widest panel a strange thing attracted my attention. A black object stood out against a square of red velvet. I went up to it; it was a hand, a human hand. Not the clean white hand of a skeleton, but a dried black hand, with yellow nails, the muscles exposed and traces of old blood on the bones, which were cut off as clean as

if it had been chopped off with an axe, near the middle of the forearm.

"Around the wrist, an enormous iron chain, riveted to this unclean member, fastened it to the wall by a ring strong enough to hold an elephant in leash.

"I asked:

" 'What is that?'

"The Englishman answered quietly:

" 'That is my best enemy. It comes from America, too. The bones were severed by a sword and the skin was cut off with a sharp stone and dried in the sun for a week.'

"I touched these human remains, which must have belonged to a giant. The uncommonly long fingers were attached by enormous tendons which still had pieces of skin hanging to them in places. This hand was terrible to see; it made one think of some savage vengeance.

"I said:

" 'This man must have been very strong.'

"The Englishman answered quietly:

" 'Yes, but I was stronger than he. I put on this chain to hold him.'

"I thought he was joking, and I said:

" 'This chain is useless now, the hand won't run away.'

"Sir John Rowell answered seriously:

" 'It always wants to go away. This chain is needed.'

"I glanced at him quickly, questioning his face, and I asked myself:

" 'Is he an insane man, or a practical joker?'

"But his face remained inscrutable, calm and friendly. I turned to other subjects, and admired his rifles.

"However, I noticed that he kept three loaded revolvers in the room, as if constantly in fear of attack.

"I paid him several calls. Then I did not go any more. People had become used to his presence; everybody had lost interest in him.

"A year rolled by. One morning, toward the end of November, my servant awoke me and announced that Sir John Rowell had been murdered in the night.

"Half an hour later I entered the Englishman's house, together with the police commissioner and the captain of the gendarmes. The servant, bewildered and in despair, was crying before the door. At first I suspected this man, but he was innocent.

"The murderer never could be found.

"On entering Sir John's parlor, I saw the body, stretched out on its back, in the middle of the room.

"His waistcoat was torn, the sleeve of his jacket had been pulled off, everything pointed to a violent struggle.

"The Englishman had been strangled! His face was black, swollen and frightful, and seemed to express a terrible fear. He held something between

his teeth, and his neck, pierced by five or six holes which looked as if they had been made by some iron instrument, was covered with blood.

"A physician joined us. He examined the finger marks on the neck for a long time and then made this strange announcement:

" 'It looks as if he had been strangled by a skeleton.'

"A cold chill seemed to run down my back, and I looked over to the place where I had seen the terrible hand. It was no longer there. The chain was hanging down, broken.

"I bent over the dead man and, in his contracted mouth, I found one of the fingers of this vanished hand, cut—or rather sawed off by the teeth down to the second knuckle.

"Then the investigation began. Nothing could be discovered. No door, window or piece of furniture had been forced. The two watch-dogs had not been aroused from their sleep.

"Here, in a few words, is the testimony of the servant:

"For a month his master had seemed excited. He had received many letters, which he immediately burned.

"Often, in a fit of passion that approached madness, he had taken a switch and struck wildly at this dried hand riveted to the wall, which had disappeared, no one knows how, at the very hour of the crime.

"He would go to bed very late and carefully lock himself in. He always kept weapons within reach. Often at night he would talk loudly, as if he were quarreling with some one.

"That night, somehow, he had made no noise, and it was only on going to open the windows that the servant had found Sir John murdered. He suspected no one.

"I communicated what I knew of the dead man to the judges and public officials. Throughout the island a minute investigation was carried on, but nothing could be found out.

"One night, about three months after the crime, I had a terrible nightmare. I seemed to see the horrible hand running over my curtains and walls like an immense scorpion or spider. Three times I awoke, three times I went to sleep again; three times I saw the hideous object galloping round my room and moving its fingers like legs.

"The following day the hand was brought to me. It had been found in the cemetery, on the grave of Sir John Rowell, who was buried there because we had been unable to find his family. The first finger was missing.

"Ladies, there is my story. I know no more."

The women, deeply stirred, were pale and trembling. One of them exclaimed:

"But that is neither a climax nor an explanation! We shall be unable to sleep unless you give us your opinion of what had occurred."

"Ladies, I shall certainly spoil your terrible dreams. I simply believe that the legitimate owner of the hand was not dead, that he came to get it with his remaining one. But I don't know how. It was a kind of vendetta."

One of the women murmured:

"No, it can't be that."

And the Judge, still smiling, said:

"Didn't I tell you that my explanation would not satisfy you?"

A LOCK OF HAIR

THE walls of the cell were bare and white-washed, and the narrow grated window was so high that one could not reach it. The mad inmate, seated on a straw chair, looked at us with a fixed, vacant and haunted expression. He was very thin, with hollow cheeks and hair almost white, which one guessed might have turned gray in a few months. His clothes appeared to be too large for his shrunken limbs, his sunken chest and his empty paunch. One felt that this man's mind had been destroyed, eaten by his thoughts, by one thought, as a fruit is eaten by a worm. His craze, his idea, was there in his brain, insistent, harassing, destructive. It wasted his frame little by little. It—the invisible, impalpable, intangible, immaterial idea—was mining his health, drinking his blood, snuffing out his life.

What a mystery was this man, being killed by an ideal! He aroused sorrow, fear and pity, this madman! What strange, tremendous and deadly thoughts dwelt within this forehead which they

creased with deep wrinkles that never were still?

"He has terrible attacks of rage," said the doctor to me. "His is one of the most peculiar cases I have ever seen. He has seizures of erotic and macaberesque madness. He is a sort of necrophile. He has kept a journal in which he sets forth his disease with the utmost clearness. In it you can, as it were, put your finger on it. If it would interest you, you may go over this document."

I followed the doctor into his office, where he handed me this wretched man's diary, saying: "Read it and tell me what you think of it."

I read as follows:

"Until the age of thirty-two, I lived peacefully, without knowing love. Life appeared very simple, very pleasant and very easy. I was rich. I enjoyed so many things that I had no passion for anything in particular. It was good to be alive! I awoke happy every morning, did those things that pleased me during the day, and went to bed at night contented, in the expectation of a peaceful to-morrow and a future without anxiety.

"I had had a few flirtations without my heart being touched by any true passion or wounded by any of the sensations of true love. It is good to live like that. It is better to love, but it is terrible. And yet those who love in the ordinary way must experience ardent happiness, though less than mine possibly, for love came to me in a remarkable manner.

"As I was wealthy, I bought all kinds of old furniture and old curiosities, and I often thought of the unknown hands that had touched these objects, of the eyes that had admired them, of the hearts that had loved them; for one does love things! I sometimes spent hours and hours looking at a little watch of the last century. It was so tiny, so pretty with its enamel and gold chasing. And it kept time as on the day when a woman first bought it, enraptured at owning the dainty trinket. It had not ceased to vibrate, to live its mechanical life, and it had kept up its regular tick-tock since the last century. Who had first worn it on her bosom amid the warmth of her clothing, the heart of the watch beating beside the heart of the woman? What hand had held it in its warm fingers, had turned it over and then wiped the enameled shepherds on the case to remove the slight moisture from her fingers? What eyes had watched the hands on its ornamental face for the expected, the beloved, the sacred hour?

"How I wished I had known her, seen her, the woman who had selected this exquisite and rare object! She is dead! I am possessed with a longing for women of former days. I love, from afar, all those who have loved. The story of those dead-and-gone loves fills my heart with regrets. Oh, the beauty, the smiles, the youthful caresses, the hopes! Should not all that be eternal?

"How I have wept all night thinking of those poor women of former days, so beautiful, so loving,

so sweet, whose arms were extended in an embrace, and who now are dead! A kiss is immortal! It goes from lips to lips, from century to century, from age to age. Men receive them, give them, and die.

"The past attracts me, the present terrifies me because the future means death. I regret all that has gone by. I mourn all who have lived; I should like to check time, to stop the clock. But time goes, it goes, it passes, it takes from me each second a little of myself for the annihilation of to-morrow. And I never shall live again.

"Farewell, ye women of yesterday. I love you!

"But I am not to be pitied. I found her, the one I was waiting for, and through her I enjoyed inestimable pleasure.

"I was sauntering in Paris on a bright, sunny morning, with a happy heart and a high step, looking in at the shop windows with the vague interest of an idler. All at once I noticed in the shop of a dealer in antiques a piece of Italian furniture of the seventeenth century. It was very handsome, very rare. I set it down as being the work of a Venetian artist named Vitelli, who was celebrated in his day.

"I went on my way.

"Why did the remembrance of that piece of furniture haunt me with such insistence that I retraced my steps? I stopped again before the shop to take another look at it, and I felt that it tempted me.

"What a singular thing temptation is! You gaze at an object, and, little by little, it charms you, it disturbs you, it fills your thoughts as a woman's face might do. The enchantment of it penetrates your being, a strange enchantment of form, color and appearance of an inanimate object. And you love it, you desire it, you wish to have it. A longing to own it takes possession of you, gently at first, as if it were timid, but growing until it is intense, irresistible.

"And the dealers seem to guess, from your ardent gaze, your secret and increasing longing.

"I bought this piece of furniture and had it sent home at once. I placed it in my room.

"Oh, I am sorry for those who do not know the honeymoon of the collector with the antique he has just purchased. One looks at it tenderly and passes one's hand over it as if it were human flesh; one comes back to it every moment, one is always thinking of it, wherever one goes, whatever one does. The dear recollection of it pursues you in the street, in society, everywhere; and when you return home at night, before taking off your gloves or your hat, you go and look at it with the tenderness of a lover.

"For eight days I worshiped this piece of furniture. I opened its doors and pulled out the drawers every few moments. I handled it with rapture, with all the intense joy of possession.

"But one evening I surmised, when I noticed the thickness of one of the panels, that there must

be a secret drawer in it. My heart began to beat, and I spent the night trying to discover the secret cavity.

"On the following day, by driving a knife into a slit in the wood I succeeded. A panel slid back and I saw, spread out on a piece of black velvet, a magnificent tress of hair.

"Yes, a woman's hair, an immense coil of fair hair, almost red, which must have been cut off close to the head, tied with a golden cord.

"I stood amazed, trembling, confused. An almost imperceptible perfume, so ancient that it seemed to be the spirit of a perfume, issued from this mysterious drawer and this remarkable relic.

"I lifted it gently, reverently, and took it out of its hiding-place. At once it unwound in a golden shower that reached to the floor, dense but light, soft and gleaming like the tail of a comet.

"A strange emotion filled me. What was this? When, how, why had this hair been shut up in this drawer? What adventure, what tragedy did this souvenir conceal? Who had cut it off? A lover on a day of farewell, a husband on a day of revenge, or she whose head it had graced on the day of despair?

"Was it as she was about to take the veil that they had cast thither that love dowry as a pledge to the world of the living? Was it when they were going to nail down the coffin of the beautiful young corpse that the one who had adored her had cut off

her tresses, the only thing that he could retain of her, the only living part of her body that would not suffer decay, the only thing he could still love, and caress, and kiss in his paroxysms of grief?

"Was it not strange that this tress should have remained as it was in life, when not an atom of the body on which it grew was in existence?

"It fell over my fingers, and tickled the skin with a singular caress, the caress of a dead woman. It affected me so that I feared I should weep.

"I held it in my hands a long time, then it seemed as if it disturbed me, as if something of the soul had remained in it. And I put it back on the velvet, rusty from age, and pushed in the drawer, closed the doors of the antique cabinet and went out to walk and meditate.

"I walked along, filled with sadness and also with unrest, the unrest that one feels when in love. I felt that I must have lived before, and must have known this woman.

"When I returned home I felt an irresistible longing to see my singular treasure, and I took it out and, as I touched it, a shiver went through me.

"For some days, however, I was in my ordinary condition, although the thought of that tress of hair was always present to my mind.

"Whenever I came into the house I had to see it and take it in my hands. I turned the key of the cabinet with the same hesitation that one opens the door leading to one's beloved, for in my hands and

my heart I felt a confused, singular, constant sensual longing to plunge my hands in the enchanting golden flood of those dead tresses.

"Then, after I had finished caressing it, and had locked the cabinet I felt as if it were a living thing, imprisoned there; and I longed to see it again. I felt again the imperious desire to take it in my hands, to touch it, even to feel uncomfortable at the cold, slippery, irritating, bewildering contact.

"I lived thus for a month or two, I forget how long. It obsessed me, haunted me. I was happy and tormented by turns, as when one has fallen in love and the first vows have been exchanged.

"I shut myself in the room with it to feel it on my skin, to bury my lips in it, to kiss it. I wound it round my face, covered my eyes with the golden flood so as to see the day gleam through its gold.

"I loved it! Yes, I loved it. I could not be without it nor pass an hour without looking at it.

"And I waited—I waited—for what? I do not know—— For her!

"One night I woke up suddenly, feeling as if I were not alone in my room.

"I was alone, nevertheless, but I could not go to sleep again, and, as I was tossing about feverishly, I got up to look at the golden tress. It seemed softer than usual, more life-like. Do the dead come back? I almost lost consciousness as I kissed it. I took it back with me to bed and pressed it to my lips as if it were my sweetheart.

"Do the dead come back? She came back. Yes, I saw her; I held her in my arms just as she was in life, tall, fair and round. She came back every evening—the dead woman, the beautiful, adorable, mysterious unknown.

"I could not conceal my happiness. No lover ever tasted such intense, terrible enjoyment. I loved her so well that I could not be separated from her. I took her with me always and everywhere. I walked about the town with her as if she were my wife, and took her to the theater, always to a private box. But they saw her—they guessed—they arrested me. They put me in prison like a criminal. They took her. Oh, misery!"

Here the manuscript ended. And as I suddenly raised my astonished eyes to the doctor a terrific cry, a howl of impotent rage and of exasperated longing resounded through the asylum.

"Listen," said the doctor. "We have to douse the obscene madman with water five times a day. Sergeant Bertrand was the only one who was in love with the dead."

Filled with astonishment, horror and pity, I stammered out:

"But—that tress—did it really exist?"

The doctor rose, opened a cabinet full of phials and instruments and tossed over a long tress of fair hair which flew toward me like a golden bird.

I shivered at feeling its soft, light touch on my hands. And I sat there, my heart beating with dis-

gust and desire, disgust as at the contact of anything accessory to a crime and desire as at the temptation of some infamous and mysterious thing.

The doctor said as he shrugged his shoulders:

"The mind of man is capable of anything."

ON THE RIVER

LAST summer I rented a small country house on the banks of the Seine, several leagues from Paris, and spent my nights there. After a few days I made the acquaintance of one of my neighbors, a man between thirty and forty, who certainly was the most curious specimen I ever met. He was an old boating man, and was crazy about boating. He was always beside the water, on the water, or in the water. He must have been born in a boat, and he will certainly die in a boat.

One evening when we were walking along the banks of the Seine I asked him to tell me some stories about his life on the water. The good man at once became animated, his whole expression changed, he became eloquent, almost poetical. His heart held one great passion, an absorbing, irresistible passion—the river.

"Ah," he said, "how many memories I have, connected with that river that you see flowing beside us! You people who live in streets know nothing about the river. But listen to a fisherman as he

mentions the word. To him it is a mysterious thing, profound, unknown, a land of mirages and phantasmagoria, where one sees by night things that do not exist, hears sounds that one does not recognize, trembles without knowing why, as in passing through a cemetery—and it is, in fact, the most sinister of cemeteries, in which one has no tomb.

"The land seems limited to the river boatman, and on dark nights, when there is no moon, the river seems limitless. A sailor has not the same feeling for the sea. It is often remorseless and cruel, it is true; but it shrieks, it roars, it is honest, the great sea; while the river is silent and perfidious. It flows along without a sound; and this eternal motion of flowing water is more terrible to me than the high waves of the ocean.

"Dreamers maintain that the sea hides in its bosom vast tracts of blue where those who are drowned roam among the big fishes, amid strange forests and crystal grottoes. The river has only black depths, where one rots in the slime. Yet it is beautiful when it sparkles in the light of the rising sun and gently laps its banks covered with whispering reeds.

"I think that those stories of the slender reeds, with their little soft voices, must be more sinister than the lugubrious tragedies told by the roaring of the waves. But as you have asked for some of my recollections, I will tell you of a singular adventure that happened to me ten years ago.

"I was living, as I am now, in Mother Lafon's house, and one of my closest friends, Louis Bernet, who has now given up boating, his low shoes and his bare neck, to go into the Supreme Court, was living in the village of C., two leagues farther down the river. We dined together every day, sometimes at his house, sometimes at mine.

"One evening as I was coming home alone and was very tired, rowing my big boat with difficulty—a twelve-footer, which I always took out at night—I stopped a few moments to draw breath near the reed-covered point yonder, about two hundred meters from the railway bridge.

"It was a magnificent night, the moon shone brightly, the river gleamed, the air was calm and soft. This peacefulness tempted me. I thought it would be pleasant to smoke a pipe in this spot, and I cast my anchor into the river.

"The boat floated downstream with the current, to the end of the chain, and then stopped, and I seated myself in the stern on my sheepskin and made myself as comfortable as possible. Not a sound was to be heard, except that I occasionally thought I could perceive an almost imperceptible lapping of the water against the bank, and I noticed taller groups of reeds which assumed strange shapes and seemed, at times, to move.

"The river was perfectly calm, but I felt myself affected by the unusual silence that surrounded me. All the creatures, frogs and toads, those nocturnal

singers of the marsh, were silent. Suddenly a frog croaked to my right and close beside me. I shuddered. It ceased, and I heard nothing more, and resolved to smoke, to soothe my mind. But, although I was a noted colorer of pipes, I could not smoke; at the second draw I was nauseated, and gave up trying. I began to sing. The sound of my voice was distressing to me. So I lay still, but presently the slight motion of the boat disturbed me. It seemed as if she were making huge lurches, from bank to bank of the river, touching each bank alternately. Then I felt as if an invisible force, or being, were drawing her to the surface of the water and lifting her out, to let her fall again. I was tossed about as in a tempest. I heard noises around me. I sprang to my feet with a single bound. The water was glistening, all was calm.

"I realized that my nerves were somewhat shaky, and I resolved to leave the spot. I pulled the anchor chain, and the boat began to move; then I felt a resistance. I pulled harder, the anchor did not come up; it had caught on something at the bottom of the river and I could not raise it. I began pulling again, but all in vain. Then, with my oars, I turned the boat with its head up stream to change the position of the anchor. It was of no use, it was still caught. I flew into a rage and shook the chain furiously. Nothing budged. I sat down, disheartened, and began to reflect on my situation. I could not dream of breaking this chain, or detaching it

from the boat, for it was massive and was riveted at the bows to a piece of wood as thick as my arm. However, as the weather was so fine I thought probably it would not be long before some fisherman came to my aid. My ill-luck had quieted me. I sat down and was able, at last, to smoke my pipe. I had a bottle of rum, and I drank two or three glasses, and was able to laugh at the situation. It was very warm, so that, if need be, I could sleep out under the stars without any great harm.

"All at once there was a little knock at the side of the boat. I gave a start, and a cold sweat broke out all over me. The noise was, doubtless, caused by some piece of wood borne along by the current, but that was enough, and I again became a prey to a strange nervous agitation. I seized the chain and strained my muscles in a desperate effort. The anchor held firm, and I sat down again, exhausted.

"The river had slowly become enveloped in a thick white fog which lay close to the water, so that when I stood up I could see neither the river, nor my feet, nor my boat; I could perceive only the tops of the reeds, and farther in the distance the plain, lying white in the moonlight, with big black patches rising from it toward the sky, which were formed by groups of Italian poplars. I was as if buried to the waist in a cloud of cotton of singular whiteness, and all sorts of strange fancies came into my mind. I thought someone was trying to climb into my boat, which I could no longer distinguish,

and that the river, hidden by the thick fog, was full of strange creatures which were swimming all around me. I felt horribly uncomfortable, my forehead felt as if it had a tight band round it, my heart beat so that it almost suffocated me, and, almost beside myself, I thought of swimming away from the place. But then, again, the very idea made me tremble with fear. I saw myself lost, going by guesswork in this heavy fog, struggling about amid the grasses and reeds which I could not escape, my breath rattling with fear, neither seeing the bank, nor finding my boat; and it seemed as if I should feel myself dragged down by the feet to the bottom of the black waters.

"In fact, as I should have had to ascend the stream at least five hundred meters before finding a spot free from grasses and rushes where I could land, there were nine chances to one that I could not find my way in the fog and that I should drown, no matter how well I could swim.

"I tried to reason with myself. I resolved not to be afraid, but there was something in me besides my will, and that other thing was afraid. I asked myself what there was to be afraid of. My brave 'ego' ridiculed my coward 'ego,' and never did I realize, as on that day, the existence in us of two rival personalities, one desiring a thing, the other resisting, and each winning the day in turn.

"This stupid, inexplicable fear increased and became terror. I remained motionless, my eyes star-

ing, my ears on the stretch with expectation. Of what? I did not know, but it must be something terrible. I believe if it had occurred to a fish to jump out of the water, as often happens, nothing more would have been required to make me fall over, stiff and unconscious.

"However, by a violent effort I succeeded in becoming almost rational again. I took up my bottle of rum and took several pulls. Then an idea came to me, and I began to shout with all my might toward all the points of the compass in succession. When my throat was absolutely paralyzed I listened. A dog was howling, at a great distance.

"I drank some more rum and stretched myself out at the bottom of the boat. I remained there about an hour, perhaps two, not sleeping, my eyes wide open, with nightmares all about me. I did not dare to rise, and yet I longed intensely to do so. I delayed it from moment to moment. I said to myself: 'Come, get up!' and I was afraid to move. At last I raised myself with infinite caution as if my life depended on the slightest sound that I might make, and looked over the edge of the boat.

"I was dazzled by the most marvelous, the most astonishing sight that it is possible to see. It was one of those phantasmagoria of fairyland, one of those sights described by travelers on their return from distant lands, whom we listen to without believing.

"The fog which, two hours before, had floated on the water, had gradually cleared off and massed on the banks, leaving the river absolutely clear; while it formed on either bank an uninterrupted wall six or seven meters high, which shone in the moonlight with the dazzling brilliance of snow. One saw nothing but the river gleaming with light between those two white mountains; and high above my head sailed the great full moon, in the midst of a bluish, milky sky.

"All the creatures in the water were awake. The frogs croaked furiously, while every few moments I heard, first to the right and then to the left, the abrupt, monotonous and mournful metallic note of the bullfrogs. Strange to say, I was no longer afraid. I was in the midst of such an unusual landscape that no remarkable thing would have astonished me.

"How long this lasted I do not know, for I ended by falling asleep. When I opened my eyes the moon had gone down and the sky was full of clouds. The water lapped mournfully, the wind was blowing, it was pitch dark.

"I drank the rest of the rum, then listened, while I trembled, to the rustling of the reeds and the foreboding sound of the river. I tried to see, but could not distinguish my boat, nor even my hands, which I held up close to my eyes.

"Little by little, however, the blackness became less intense. All at once I thought I noticed a

shadow gliding past, quite near me. I shouted, a voice replied; it was a fisherman. I called him; he came near and I told him of my ill-luck. He rowed his boat alongside of mine and, together, we pulled at the anchor chain. The anchor did not move. Day came, gloomy gray, rainy and cold, one of those days that bring sorrows and misfortunes. I saw another boat. We hailed it. The man on board of her joined his efforts to ours, and gradually the anchor yielded. It rose, but slowly, slowly, loaded down by a considerable weight. At length we perceived a black mass and we drew it on board.

"It was the corpse of an old woman with a big stone round her neck."

MY UNCLE SOSTHENES

SOME persons are Freethinkers from sheer stupidity, and my Uncle Sosthenes was one of them. Some are religious for the same reason. The mere sight of a priest threw my uncle into a violent rage. He would shake his fist and make grimaces at him, and would then touch a piece of iron when the priest's back was turned, forgetting that the latter action showed a belief after all, the belief in the evil eye. Now, when beliefs are unreasonable, one should have either all or none. I myself am a Freethinker; I revolt at all dogmas, but feel no anger toward places of worship, be they Catholic, Apostolic, Protestant, Greek, Buddhist, Jewish, or Mohammedan.

My uncle was a Freemason, and I used to declare that the Masons are stupider than old women devotees. That is my opinion, and I maintain it; if we must have any religion at all, the old one is good enough for me.

What is their object? Mutual help to be obtained by tickling the palms of each other's hands. I see no harm in it, for they put into practice the Chris-

tian precept: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." The only difference consists in the tickling, but it does not seem worth while to make such a fuss about lending a poor devil half a crown.

To all my arguments my uncle's reply used to be:

"We are raising up a religion against a religion. Free Thought will kill clericalism. Freemasonry is the stronghold of those who are demolishing all deities."

"Very well, my dear uncle," I would reply—in my heart I felt inclined to say, "You old idiot!"—"it is just that which I am blaming you for. Instead of destroying, you are organizing competition; it is only a case of lowering prices. And then, if you admitted only Freethinkers among you, I could understand it, but you admit anybody. You have Catholics among you, even the leaders of the party. Pius IX is said to have been one of you before he became pope. If you call a society with such an organization a bulwark against clericalism, I think it is an extremely weak one."

"My dear boy," my uncle would reply, with a wink, "we are most to be dreaded in politics; slowly and surely we are everywhere undermining the monarchical spirit."

Then I broke out: "Yes, you are very clever! If you tell me that Freemasonry is a political machine, I will grant it. I will never deny that it

is used as a machine to control candidates of all shades; if you say it is only used to hoodwink people, to drill them to go to the polls as soldiers are sent under fire, I agree with you; if you declare that it is indispensable to all political ambitions because it changes all its members into electoral agents, I should say to you: 'That is as clear as the sun.' But when you tell me that it serves to undermine the monarchical spirit, I can only laugh in your face.

"Just consider that gigantic and secret democratic association which had Prince Napoleon for its grand master under the Empire; which has the Crown Prince for its grand master in Germany, the Czar's brother in Russia, and to which the Prince of Wales and King Humbert and nearly all the crowned heads of the globe belong."

"You are quite right," my uncle said; "but all these persons are serving our projects without guessing it."

I felt inclined to tell him he was talking nonsense.

It was indeed a marvel to see my uncle when he had a Freemason to dinner. On meeting they shook hands in a manner that was irresistibly funny; one could see that they were going through a series of secret, mysterious signs. Then my uncle would take his friend into a corner to tell him something important, and at dinner they had a peculiar way of looking at each other, and of drinking to each other, in a manner as if to say: "We know all

about it, don't we?" And to think that there are millions on the face of the globe who are amused at such monkey tricks! I would sooner be a Jesuit.

Now, in our town there really was an old Jesuit who was my uncle's detestation. Every time he met him, or if he only saw him at a distance, he used to say: "Get away, you toad." And then, taking my arm, he would whisper to me:

"See here, that fellow will play me a trick some day or other, I feel sure of it."

My uncle spoke quite truly, and this was the way it happened, and through my fault.

It was close on Holy Week, and my uncle made up his mind to give a dinner on Good Friday, a real dinner, with his favorite chitterlings and black puddings. I resisted as much as I could, and said:

"I shall eat meat on that day, but at home, all by myself. Your *manifestation,* as you call it, is an idiotic idea. Why should you manifest? What does it matter to you if people refrain from meat?"

But my uncle would not be persuaded. He asked three of his friends to dine with him at one of the best restaurants in the town, and as he was to pay the bill I had certainly, after all, no scruples about *manifesting.*

At four o'clock we took a conspicuous place in the most frequented restaurant in the town, and in a loud voice, my uncle ordered dinner for six o'clock.

We sat down punctually, and at ten o'clock we

had not finished. Five of us had drunk eighteen bottles of choice still wine and four of champagne. Then my uncle proposed what he was in the habit of calling "the archbishop's circuit." Each man put six small glasses in front of him, each of them filled with a different liquor, and they had all to be emptied at one gulp, one after another, while one of the waiters counted twenty. It was very stupid, but my silly uncle thought it was suitable to the occasion.

At eleven o'clock he was as drunk as a fly. So we had to take him home in a cab and put him to bed, and one could easily see that his anti-clerical demonstration would end in a terrible fit of indigestion.

As I was going back to my lodgings, being somewhat drunk myself, with a cheerful drunkenness, I was struck by a Machiavellian idea, which satisfied all my skeptical instincts.

I arranged my necktie, put on a look of great distress, and went and rang loudly at the old Jesuit's door. As he was deaf I had to wait a long while, but at last he appeared at his window in a cotton nightcap and asked what I wanted.

I shouted at the top of my voice:

"Make haste, reverend sir, and open the door; a poor, despairing, sick man is in need of your spiritual ministrations."

The good, kind man put on his trousers as quickly as he could, and came down without his cassock. I told him in a breathless voice that my uncle, the

Freethinker, had been taken suddenly ill, and fearing it was going to be something serious, he had been seized with a sudden dread of death, and wished to see the priest and talk to him; to have his advice and comfort, to make his peace with the Church and to confess, so as to be able to cross the dreaded threshold at peace with himself; and I added in a mocking tone:

"At any rate, he wishes it, and if it does him no good it can do him no harm."

The old Jesuit, who was startled, delighted, and almost trembling, said to me:

"Wait a moment, my son; I will come with you." But I replied: "Pardon me, reverend father, if I do not go with you; but my convictions will not allow me to do so. I even refused to come and fetch you, so I beg you not to say you have seen me, but to declare that you had a presentiment—a sort of revelation of his illness."

The priest consented and went off quickly, knocked at my uncle's door, and was soon let in; and I saw the black cassock disappear within that stronghold of Free Thought.

I hid under a neighboring gateway to await results. Had he been well, my uncle would have half-murdered the Jesuit, but I knew he would hardly be able to move an arm, and I asked myself gleefully what sort of scene would take place between these antagonists, what disputes, what arguments, what a hubbub, and what would be the issue of the situa-

tion, which my uncle's indignation would render fairly tragic?

I laughed till my sides ached, and said half aloud: "Oh, what a joke, what a joke!"

Meanwhile it was growing very cold, and I noticed that the Jesuit remained a long time, and I thought: "They are having an argument, I suppose."

One, two, three hours passed, and still the reverend father did not come out. What had happened? Had my uncle died in a fit when he saw him, or had he killed the Jesuit? Perhaps they had devoured each other? This last supposition appeared very unlikely, for I fancied that my uncle was incapable of swallowing a grain more nourishment at that moment.

At last the day broke.

I was very uneasy, and, not venturing to go into the house myself, went to a friend who lived opposite. I woke him up, explained matters, much to his amusement and astonishment, and took possession of his window.

At nine o'clock he relieved me, and I got a little sleep. At two o'clock, in my turn, I replaced him. We were utterly astonished.

At six o'clock the Jesuit left, with a very happy and satisfied look on his face, and we saw him go away with a quiet step.

Then, timid and ashamed, I went and knocked at the door of my uncle's house; and when the servant

opened it I did not dare to question her, but went upstairs without a word.

My uncle was lying, pale and exhausted, with weary, sorrowful eyes and heavy arms, on his bed. A little religious picture was fastened to one of the bed-curtains with a pin.

"Why, uncle," I said, "in bed still? Are you ill?"

He replied in a feeble voice:

"Oh, my dear boy, I have been very ill, nearly dead."

"How was that, uncle?"

"I don't know; it was most surprising. But what is stranger still is that the Jesuit priest who has just left—you know, that excellent man whom I have made such fun of—had a divine revelation of my state, and came to see me."

I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, and with difficulty said: "Oh, really!"

"Yes, he came. He heard a voice telling him to get up and come to me, because I was going to die. It was a revelation."

I pretended to sneeze, so as not to burst out laughing; I felt inclined to roll on the ground with amusement.

In about a minute I managed to say indignantly: "And you received him, uncle? You, a Freethinker, a Freemason? You did not have him thrown out of doors?"

He appeared confused, and stammered:

"Listen a moment, it is so astonishing—so as-

tonishing and providential! He also spoke to me about my father; it seems he knew him formerly."

"Your father, uncle? But that is no reason for receiving a Jesuit."

"I know that, but I was very ill, and he looked after me most devotedly all night long. He was perfect; no doubt he saved my life; those men all know a little of medicine."

"Oh! he looked after you all night? But you said just now that he had been gone only a very short time."

"That is quite true; I kept him to breakfast after all his kindness. He had it at a table by my bedside while I drank a cup of tea."

"And he ate meat?"

My uncle looked vexed, as if I had said something very uncalled-for, and then added:

"Don't joke, Gaston; such things are out of place at times. He has shown me more devotion than many a relative would have done, and I expect to have his convictions respected."

This rather upset me, but I answered: "Very well, uncle; and what did you do after breakfast?"

"We played a game of bezique, and then he repeated his breviary while I read a little book that he happened to have in his pocket, which was not by any means badly written."

"A religious book, uncle?"

"Yes, and no, or, rather—no. It is the history of their missions in Central Africa, and is rather a

book of travels and adventures. What these men have done is very grand."

I began to feel that matters were going badly, so I rose. "Well, good-by, uncle," I said, "I see you are going to give up Freemasonry for religion; you are a renegade."

He was still somewhat confused, and stammered:

"Well, but religion is a sort of Freemasonry."

"When is your Jesuit coming back?" I asked.

"I don't—I don't know exactly; to-morrow, perhaps; but it is not certain."

I went out, overwhelmed.

My joke turned out very badly for me! My uncle became thoroughly converted, and if that had been all I should not have cared so much. Clerical or Freemason, to me it is all the same; six of one and half a dozen of the other; but the worst of it is that he has just made his will and he has disinherited me in favor of the order of Jesuits!

AN ARTIST

AH, Monsieur!" said the old juggler, "it is only a matter of practice and habit, that is all. Of course one must have a little talent in that direction and not be butter-fingered, but what is chiefly necessary is patience and daily practice for long, long years."

His modesty surprised me all the more because he was the cleverest performer of the kind I had ever seen, though most of them are infatuated with their own skill. I had frequently seen him in some circus, or even in traveling shows, as had every one, performing the trick that consists of putting a man or a woman with extended arms against a wooden target and throwing knives from a distance between their fingers and round their head. There is nothing very extraordinary in it, after all, when one knows the tricks of the trade, and that the knives are not the least sharp, and stick into the wood at some distance from the flesh. It is the rapidity of the throws, the glitter of the blades, the curve which the handles make toward their living

aim which give an air of danger to an exhibition that has become commonplace and only requires very middling skill.

But here there was no trick and no deception and no dust thrown into the eyes. It was done in good earnest and in all sincerity. The knives were as sharp as razors, and the old mountebank planted them close to the flesh, exactly in the angle between the fingers, and surrounded the head with a perfect halo of knives, and the neck with a collar, from which nobody could have extricated himself without cutting his carotid artery, while to increase the difficulty the old fellow went through the performance blindfolded, his whole face being covered with a close mask of thick oilcloth.

Naturally, like other great artists, he was not understood by the crowd, who confounded him with vulgar tricksters, and his mask only appeared to them a trick the more, and a very common trick in the bargain. "He must think us very stupid," they said. "How could he possibly aim without having his eyes open?" And they thought there must be imperceptible holes in the oilcloth, a sort of lattice-work concealed in the material. It was useless for him to allow the public to examine the mask for themselves before the exhibition began. It was well enough that they could not discover any trick, but they were all the more convinced that they were being tricked. Did not the people realize that they ought to be tricked?

I recognized a great artist in the old juggler, and I was quite sure that he was altogether incapable of any trickery, and I told him so, while expressing my admiration; and he had been touched by my admiration and, above all, by the justice I had done him. Thus we became good friends, and he explained to me, very modestly, the real trick, which the crowd cannot understand, the eternal trick comprised in these simple words: "To be gifted by nature, and to practice every day for long, long years."

He had been especially struck by my saying that I believed him incapable of trickery. "Yes," he said to me; "quite incapable. Incapable to a degree which you cannot imagine. If I were to tell you! But where would be the use?"

His face clouded over and his eyes filled with tears, but I did not venture to force his confidence. My looks, however, were no doubt not as discreet as my silence, and begged him to speak, and so he responded to their mute appeal.

"After all," he said, "why should I not tell you about it? You will understand me." And he added, with a look of sudden ferocity: "She understood it, at any rate!"

"Who?" I asked.

"My faithless wife," he replied. "Ah! Monsieur, what an abominable creature she was, if you only knew! Yes, she understood it too well, too well, and that is the reason I hate her so; even more

on that account than for having deceived me. For that is a natural fault, is it not, and may be pardoned? But the other thing was a crime, a horrible crime."

The woman who stood against the wooden target every night with her arms stretched out and her fingers extended, and whom the old juggler fitted with gloves and with a halo formed of his knives, which were as sharp as razors and which he planted close to her, was his wife. She might have been a woman of forty, and must have been fairly pretty, but with a perverse prettiness. She had an impudent mouth, a mouth that was at the same time sensual and bad, with the lower lip too thick for the thin, dry upper lip.

I had several times noticed that every time he planted a knife in the board she uttered a laugh, so low as scarcely to be heard, but which was very significant when one heard it, for it was a hard and very mocking laugh, but I had always attributed that sort of reply to some artifice which the occasion required. It was intended, I thought, to accentuate the danger she incurred and the contempt that she felt for it, thanks to the sureness of the thrower's hands, and so I was very much surprised when the old man said to me:

"Have you observed her laugh, I say? Her evil laugh, which makes fun of me, and her cowardly laugh, which defies me? Yes, cowardly, because she knows that nothing can happen to her,

nothing, in spite of all she deserves, in spite of all that I ought to do to her, in spite of all that I *want* to do to her."

"What do you want to do?"

"Confound it! Cannot you guess? I want to kill her."

"To kill her because she has——"

"Because she has deceived me? No, no, not that, I tell you again. I have forgiven her for that, a long time ago, and I am too much accustomed to it! But the worst of it is that the first time I forgave her, when I told her that, all the same, I might some day have my revenge by cutting her throat, if I chose, without seeming to do it on purpose, as if it were an accident, mere awkwardness——"

"Oh! So you said that to her?"

"Of course I did, and I meant it. I thought I might be able to do it, for, you see, I had a perfect right to do so. It was so simple, so easy, so tempting! Just think! A mistake of less than half an inch, and her skin would be cut at the neck where the jugular vein is, and the jugular would be severed. My knives cut very well! And when once the jugular is cut—good-by! The blood would spurt out, one, two, three red jets, and all would be over; she would be dead, and I should have had my revenge!"

"That is true, certainly, horribly true!"

"And without any risk to me, eh? An acci-

dent, that is all; bad luck, one of those mistakes which happen every day in our business. What could they accuse me of? Accidental homicide, that would be all! They would even pity me rather than accuse me. 'My wife! My poor wife! I should say, sobbing. 'My wife, who is so necessary to me, who is half the bread-winner, who takes part in my performance!' You will acknowledge that I should be pitied!"

"There is not the least doubt about that."

"And you must allow that such a revenge would be a very nice revenge, the best possible revenge that I could have with impunity?"

"Evidently that is so."

"Very well! But when I told her so, just as I have told you, only more forcibly, threatening her, as I was mad with rage and ready to do the deed that I had dreamed of on the spot, what do you think she said?"

"That you were a good fellow, and would certainly not have the atrocious courage to——"

"Tut! tut! tut! I am not such a good fellow as you think. I am not afraid of blood, and that I have proved already, though it would be useless to tell you how and where. But I had no need to prove it to her, for she knows that I am capable of a good many things, even of crime."

"And she was not frightened?"

"No. She merely replied that I could not do what I said. That I could not do it!"

"Why not?"

"Ah! Monsieur, so you do not understand? why do you not? Have I not explained to you by what constant, long daily practice I have learned to plant my knives without seeing what I am doing?"

"Yes; well, what then?"

"Well! Cannot you understand what she has understood with such terrible results, that now my hand would no longer obey me if I wished to make a mistake as I threw?"

"Is it possible?"

"Nothing is truer, I am sorry to say. For I really have wished to have my revenge, which I have dreamed of and which I thought so easy. Exasperated by that bad woman's insolence and confidence of her own safety, I have several times made up my mind to kill her, and have exerted all my energy and all my skill to make my knives fly aside when I threw them to make a border round her neck. I tried with all my might to make them deviate half an inch, just enough to cut her throat. I wanted to, and I have never succeeded, never. And always the creature's horrible laugh jeers at me, always, always."

And with a deluge of tears, with something like a roar of unsatiated and muzzled rage, he ground his teeth: "She knows me, the jade; she is in the secret of my work, of my patience, of my trick, routine, whatever you may call it! She lives

in my innermost being, and sees into it more closely than you do, or than I do myself. She knows what a faultless machine I have become, the machine of which she makes fun, the machine that is too well wound up, the machine that cannot get out of order, and she knows that I *cannot* make a mistake."

FATHER TOINE

FATHER TOINE was known for thirty miles round—fat Toine, Toine-my-Extra, Antoine Mâcheblé, nicknamed Burnt-Brandy—the innkeeper of Tournevent. It was he who made famous this hamlet buried in a niche in the valley that led down to the sea, a poor little peasants' hamlet consisting of ten Norman cottages surrounded by ditches and trees.

The houses were hidden behind a curve that had given the place the name of Tournevent. It seemed to have sought shelter in this ravine overgrown with grass and rushes, from the keen, salt sea wind—the ocean wind that devours and burns like fire, that dries up and withers like the sharpest frost of winter, just as birds seek shelter in the furrows of the fields in time of storm.

But the whole hamlet appeared to be the property of Antoine Mâcheblé, nicknamed Burnt-Brandy, who was called also Toine, or Toine-my-Extra-Special, the latter in consequence of a phrase current in his mouth: "My Extra-Special is the best in France."

His "Extra-Special" was, of course, his cognac.

For twenty years he had served the whole countryside with his Extra-Special and his "Burnt-Brandy," for whenever he was asked: "What shall I drink, Toine?" he invariably answered: "A burnt-brandy, my son-in-law; that warms the inside and clears the head—there's nothing better for your body."

He called everyone his son-in-law, though he had no daughter, either married or to be married.

Well known indeed was Toine Burnt-Brandy, the stoutest man in all Normandy. His little house seemed far too small and too low to hold him; and when people saw him standing at his door, as he did all day long, they asked one another how he could possibly get through the door. But he went in whenever a customer appeared, for it was only right that Toine should be invited to take his thimbleful of whatever was drunk in his wine shop.

His inn bore the sign: "The Friends' Meeting-Place"—and old Toine was, indeed, the friend of all. His customers came from Fécamp and Montvilliers, just to see him and hear him talk; for fat Toine would have made a tombstone laugh. He had a way of chaffing people without offending them, or of winking to express what he didn't say, of slapping his thigh when he was merry in such a way as to make you hold your sides, laughing. And then, merely to see him drink was a curiosity. He drank everything that was offered him, his

roguish eyes twinkling, both with the enjoyment of drinking and at the thought of the money he was taking in. His was a double pleasure.

You should have heard him quarreling with his wife! It was worth paying for to see them together. They had wrangled all the thirty years they had been married; but Toine was good-humored, while she grew angry. She was a tall peasant woman, who walked with long steps like a stork, and had a face resembling that of an angry screech-owl. She spent her time rearing chickens in a little poultry-yard behind the inn, and she was noted for her success in fattening them for the table.

Whenever the gentry of Fécamp gave a dinner they must have at least one of Madame Toine's chickens.

But she was born ill-tempered, and she went through life in a mood of perpetual discontent. Annoyed at everyone, she seemed to be particularly annoyed at her husband. She disliked his gayety, his reputation, his rude health, his embonpoint. She treated him as a good-for-nothing creature because he earned his money without working, and as a glutton because he ate and drank as much as ten ordinary men; and not a day went by without her declaring spitefully:

"You'd be better in the stye along with the pigs! You're so fat it makes me sick to look at you!"

And she would shout in his face:

"Wait! Wait a bit! We'll see! You'll burst

one of these fine days, like a sack of corn—you old bloat, you!"

Toine would laugh, patting his corpulent person, and reply:

"Well, well, old hen, why don't you fatten up your chickens like that? Just try!"

And, rolling his sleeve back from his enormous arm, he said:

"That would make a fine wing now, wouldn't it?"

And the customers, doubled up with laughter, would thump the table with their fists and stamp their feet on the floor.

The old woman, mad with rage, would repeat:

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit! You'll see what'll happen. He'll burst like a sack of grain!"

And off she would go, amid the jeers and laughter of the drinkers.

Toine was, in fact, an astonishing sight, he was so fat, so heavy, so red. He was one of those enormous beings with whom Death seems to be amusing himself—playing perfidious tricks and pranks, investing with an irresistibly comic air his slow work of destruction. Instead of manifesting his approach, as with others, in white hairs, in emaciation, in wrinkles, in the gradual collapse that makes the onlookers say: "Gad! how he has changed!" he took a malicious pleasure in fattening Toine, in making him monstrous and absurd, in tingeing his face a deep crimson, in giving him the

appearance of superhuman health; and the changes he inflicts on all were in the case of Toine laughable, comic, amusing, instead of being painful and distressing to witness.

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit!" said his wife. "You'll see."

At last Toine had an apoplectic fit, and was paralyzed. The giant was put to bed in the little room behind the partition of the drinking-room that he might hear what was said and talk to his friends, for his head was quite clear although his enormous body was helplessly inert. It was hoped that his immense legs would regain some degree of power; but this hope soon disappeared, and Toine spent his days and nights in the bed, which was made up only once a week, with the help of four neighbors, who lifted the innkeeper, each holding a limb, while his mattress was turned.

He kept his spirits; but his gayety was of a different kind—more timid, more humble; and he lived in a constant, childlike fear of his wife, who grumbled from morning till night:

"Look at him there—the great glutton! the good-for-nothing creature, the old drunkard! Serves him right, serves him right!"

He no longer answered her. He contented himself with winking behind the old woman's back, and turning over on his other side—the only movement of which he was now capable. He called this exercise a "tack to the north" or a "tack to the south."

His great distraction nowadays was to listen to the conversations in the bar, and to shout through the wall when he recognized a friend's voice:

"Hello, my son-in-law! Is that you, Célestin?"

And Célestin Maloisel answered:

"Yes, it's me, Toine. Are you getting about again, old fellow?"

"Not exactly getting about," answered Toine. "But I haven't grown thin; my carcass is still good."

Soon he fell into the habit of asking his intimates into his room to keep him company, although it grieved him to see that they had to drink without him.

"That's what hurts worst of all," he would say —"that I cannot drink my Extra-Special any more. I can put up with everything else, but going without drink is the very deuce."

Then his wife's screech-owl face would appear at the window, and she would break in with:

"Look at him! Look at him now, the good-for-nothing wretch! I've got to feed him and wash him just as if he were a pig!"

And when the old woman had gone, a cock with red feather would sometimes fly up to the window-sill and looking into the room with his round inquisitive eye, would begin to crow loudly. Occasionally, too, a few hens would flutter as far as the foot of the bed, seeking crumbs on the floor. Toine's friends soon deserted the bar-room to come and chat every afternoon beside the invalid's bed. Help-

less though he was, the jovial Toine still provided them with amusement. He would have made the devil himself laugh. Three men were regular in their attendance at the bedside: Célestin Maloisel, a tall, thin fellow, somewhat gnarled, like the trunk of an apple-tree; Prosper Horslaville, a withered little man with a ferret nose, cunning as a fox; and Césaire Paumelle, who never spoke, but who enjoyed Toine's society all the same.

They brought a plank from the yard, propped it upon the edge of the bed, and played dominoes from two till six.

But Toine's wife soon became insufferable. She could not endure that her fat, lazy husband should amuse himself at games while lying in bed; and whenever she caught him beginning a game she pounced furiously on the dominoes, overturned the plank, and carried all away into the bar, declaring that it was quite enough to have to feed that fat, lazy pig without seeing him amusing himself, as if to annoy poor people who had to work hard all day long.

Célestin Maloisel and Césaire Paumelle bent their heads to the storm, but Prosper Horslaville egged on the old woman, and was amused at her wrath. One day, when she was more angry than usual, he said:

"Do you know what I would do if I were you?"

She fixed her owl's eyes on him, and waited for his next words.

Prosper continued:

"Your man is as hot as an oven, and he never leaves his bed—well, I'd make him hatch eggs."

She was struck dumb at the suggestion, thinking that Prosper could not possibly be in earnest. But he added:

"I'd put five under one arm, and five under the other, the same day that I set a hen. They'd all come out at the same time; then I'd take your husband's chickens to the hen to bring up with her own. You'd rear a fine lot that way."

"Could that be done?" asked the astonished old woman.

"Could it be done?" echoed the man. "Why not? Since eggs can be hatched in a warm box why shouldn't they be hatched in a warm bed?"

She was struck by this reasoning, and went away soothed and reflective. A week later she entered Toine's room with her apron full of eggs, and said:

"I've just put the yellow hen on ten eggs. Here are ten for you; try not to break them."

"What do you want?" asked the amazed Toine.

"I want you to hatch them, you lazy creature!"

He laughed at first; then, finding she was serious, he got angry, and refused absolutely to have the eggs put under his great arms, that the warmth of his body might hatch them. But the old woman declared wrathfully:

"You'll get no dinner as long as you won't have them. You'll see what'll happen."

Toine was uneasy, but answered nothing. When twelve o'clock struck, he called out:

"Hello, mother, is the soup ready?"

"There's no soup for you, lazy-bones," cried the old woman from her kitchen.

He thought she must be joking, and waited a while. Then he begged, implored, swore, "tacked to the north" and "tacked to the south," and beat on the wall with his fists, but had to consent at last to five eggs being placed against his left side; after which he had his soup.

That afternoon his friends thought he must be ill, he seemed so constrained and queer.

They began the daily game of dominoes. But Toine appeared to take no pleasure in it, reaching forth his hand very slowly, and with great precaution.

"What's wrong with your arm?" asked Horslaville.

"I have a sort of stiffness in the shoulder," answered Toine.

Suddenly they heard people come into the inn. The players were silent.

It was the Mayor with the deputy. They ordered two glasses of Extra-Special, and began to discuss local affairs. As they were talking in somewhat low tones Toine wanted to put his ear to the wall, and, forgetting all about his eggs, he made a sudden "tack to the north," which had the effect of plunging him into the midst of an omelette.

At the loud oath he swore his wife came hurrying into the room, and, guessing what had happened, stripped the bedclothes from him with lightning rapidity. At first she stood speechless with indignation at sight of the yellow poultice sticking to her husband's side. Then, trembling with fury, she threw herself on the paralytic, showering on him such blows as those with which she cleaned her linen on the seashore. Toine's three friends were choking with laughter, coughing, spluttering and shouting, and the fat innkeeper himself warded his wife's attacks with all the prudence of which he was capable, that he might not also break the five eggs at his other side.

Toine was conquered. He had to hatch eggs, he had to give up his games of dominoes and renounce movement of any sort, for the old woman angrily deprived him of food whenever he broke an egg.

He lay on his back, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, motionless, his arms raised like wings, warming against his body the rudimentary chickens enclosed in their white shells.

He spoke now only in hushed tones, as if he feared a noise as much as motion, and he took a feverish interest in the yellow hen that was accomplishing a similar task in the poultry-yard.

"Has the yellow hen eaten her food all right?" he would ask his wife.

And the old woman went from her fowls to her husband, and from her husband to her fowls, de-

voured by anxiety as to the welfare of the little chickens that were maturing in the bed and in the nest.

The country people who knew the story came, agog with curiosity, to ask news of Toine. They entered his room on tiptoe, as one enters a sick-chamber, and asked:

"Well! how goes it?"

"Very well," said Toine; "only it keeps me fearfully hot."

One morning his wife entered in great excitement, and announced:

"The yellow hen has seven chickens! Three of the eggs were addled."

Toine's heart beat painfully. How many would he have?

"Will it soon be over?" he asked, with the anxiety of a woman who is about to become a mother.

"It's to be hoped so!" the old woman answered crossly, haunted by fear of failure.

They waited. Friends of Toine who had learned that his time was drawing near arrived, and filled the little room.

Nothing else was talked about in the neighboring cottages. Inquirers asked one another for news as they stood at their doors.

About three o'clock Toine fell asleep. He slumbered half his time nowadays. He was suddenly awakened by an unaccustomed tickling under his

right arm. He put his left hand on the spot, and seized a little creature covered with yellow down, which fluttered in his hand.

His emotion was so great that he cried out, and let go his hold of the chicken, which ran over his chest. The bar was full of people at the time. The customers rushed to Toine's room, and made a circle round him as they would round a traveling showman, while Madame Toine picked up the chicken which had taken refuge under her husband's beard.

No one spoke, so great was the tension. It was a warm April day. Outside the window the yellow hen could be heard calling to her brood.

Toine, who was perspiring with emotion and anxiety, murmured:

"I have another now—under the left arm."

His wife plunged her great bony hand into the bed, and pulled out a second chicken with all the care of a midwife.

The neighbors asked to see it, and it was passed from one to another and examined as if it were a phenomenon.

For twenty minutes no more hatched out, then four emerged at the same moment from their shells.

There was a great commotion among the onlookers. And Toine smiled with satisfaction, beginning to take pride in this unusual sort of paternity. There were not many like him! Truly, he was a remarkable specimen of humanity!

"That makes six!" he declared. "Great heavens, what a christening we'll have!"

And a loud laugh rose from all present. Newcomers filled the bar. They asked one another:

"How many are there?" "Six."

Toine's wife took this new family to the hen, which clucked loudly, bristled her feathers, and spread her wings wide to shelter her growing brood of little ones.

"There's one more!" cried Toine.

He was mistaken. There were three! It was an unalloyed triumph! The last chicken broke through its shell at seven o'clock in the evening. All the eggs were good! And Toine, beside himself with joy, his brood hatched out, exultant, kissed the tiny creature on the back, almost suffocating it. He wanted to keep it in his bed until morning, moved by a mother's tenderness toward the tiny being that he had brought to life, but the old woman carried it away like the others, turning a deaf ear to her husband's entreaties.

The delighted spectators went off to spread the news, and Horslaville, who was the last to go, asked:

"You'll invite me when the first is cooked, won't you, Toine?"

At this idea a smile overspread the fat man's face, and he answered:

"Certainly I'll invite you, my son-in-law."

THE VIATICUM

"CAN anyone tell, after all, what truth there was in what was said almost unreservedly at court?" said the Comte d'Avorsy, as he slowly stirred his tea. "Did the Empress, whose beauty has been destroyed by some secret sorrow—who will no longer see anyone and who soothes her continual mental weariness by journeys without an object and without a rest, in foggy and melancholy islands—did she really forget that Cæsar's wife should be above suspicion? Did she really give herself to that strange and attractive *roué,* Ladislas Ferkoz?"

The bright night seemed to be scattering handfuls of stars into the placid sea, which was as smooth as a blue pond slumbering in the depths of a forest. Amid the tall climbing roses, which hung like a mantle of yellow blossoms on the fretted balustrade of the terrace, the illuminated fronts of the hotels and villas stood out in the distance and occasionally women's laughter was heard above the dull, monotonous sound of surf and the whistle of the fog-horns.

Captain Sigmund Oroshaz, whose sad face—the pensive face of a soldier who has seen too much slaughter and too many charnel-houses—was marked by a large scar, raised his head and said in a grave, haughty voice:

"No one has lied in accusing Maria-Gloriosa of being untrue, and no one has calumniated the Empress, or her Minister, whom God has damned in the other world. Ladislas Ferkoz was his sovereign's lover until he died, and made his august master ridiculous and almost odious; for the man, no matter who he may be, who allows himself to be flouted by a creature that is unworthy of bearing his name and of sharing his bread, who endures such disgrace, who does not crush the guilty pair with all the weight of his power, is not worthy of pity, nor does he deserve to be spared contempt. And if I affirm this so harshly, my dear Count—although years and years have passed since the sponge wiped out that old story—it is because I saw the last chapter of it—in spite of myself, however—for I was the officer who was on duty at the palace, and obliged to obey orders, as if I had been on the field of battle—and on that day I was on duty near Maria-Gloriosa."

Madame de Laumières, who had begun an animated conversation on crinolines, amid the fragrant odor of Russian cigarettes, and who was satirizing the striking toilets, which she had amused herself by scanning through her opera-glass a few

hours previously at the races, became silent, for even when she was talking most volubly she always kept her ears open to hear what was being said around her, and as her curiosity was aroused she interrupted Sigmund Oroshaz.

"Ah! Monsieur," she said, "you will not be so cruel as to leave our curiosity unsatisfied . . . a story about the Empress puts all our scandals on the shelf, and all our questions of dress into the shade, and I am sure," she added, with a smile at the corners of her mouth, "that even our friend Madame d'Ormonde will leave off flirting with Monsieur Le Brassard to listen to you."

Captain Oroshaz continued, with his large blue eyes full of recollections:

"This event occurred in the midst of a grand ball the Emperor was giving on the occasion of some family anniversary—though I forget exactly of what—and Maria-Gloriosa, who was in great grief, as she had heard that her far-away lover was ill and his life almost despaired of, showed a face as pale as that of Our Lady of Sorrows; she seemed to be a soul in affliction, and appeared to be ashamed of her bare shoulders, as if she were being made a parade of in the light, while he, the adored of her heart, was lying on a bed of sickness, growing weaker every moment, longing for her, and perhaps calling for her in his distress. About midnight, when the violins were striking up the quadrille, which the Emperor was to dance with the wife of

the French Ambassador, one of the ladies of honor, the Countess Szegedin, went to the Empress, and whispered a few words to her. Maria-Gloriosa grew still paler, but mastered her emotion and waited until the end of the last figure. Then, however, she could not restrain herself any longer, and even without giving any pretext for running away in such a manner, and leaning on the arm of her lady-in-waiting, she made her way through the crowd as if she were in a dream and went to her own apartments. I told you that I was on duty that evening at the door of her rooms, and, according to etiquette, I was about to salute her respectfully, but she did not give me time.

"'Captain,' she said, excitedly and vehemently, 'give orders for my own private coachman, Hans Hildersheim, to get a carriage ready for me without delay.' Thinking better of it immediately, she went on: 'But no, we should only lose time, and every instant is precious. Give me a cloak quickly, Madame, and a lace veil; we will go out of one of the small gates in the park, and take the first carriage we see.'

"She wrapped herself in furs, hid her face in her mantilla, and I accompanied her, without at first knowing what this mystery was and where we were going on this mad expedition. I hailed a carriage standing by the side of the pavement, and when the Empress gave me the address of Ladislas Ferkoz, the Minister of State, in a low voice, in

spite of my usual phlegm, I felt a vague shiver of emotion, one of those movements of hesitation and recoil from which the bravest are not exempt at times. But how could I get out of this unpleasant part of acting as her companion, and how show lack of courtesy to a sovereign who had completely lost her head? So we set off, but the Empress paid no more attention to me than as if I had not been sitting by her side in that narrow conveyance, but stifled her sobs with her handkerchief, muttered a few incoherent words, and occasionally trembled from head to foot. Her lover's name rose to her lips as if it had been a response in a litany, and I thought that she was praying to the Virgin that she might not arrive too late to see Ladislas Ferkoz again in the possession of his faculties, and begging her to keep him alive for a few hours. Suddenly, as if in reply to herself, she said: 'I will not weep any more; he must see me looking beautiful, so that he may remember me, even in death!'

"When we arrived I saw that we were expected, and that they had not doubted that the Empress would come to close her lover's eyes with a last kiss. She left me there and hurried to Ladislas Ferkoz's room, without even shutting the doors behind her. His beautiful, sensual, gipsy-like head stood out from the whiteness of the pillows; but his face was quite bloodless, and there was no life left in it, except in his strange large eyes, which had a golden gleam, like the eyes of a clairvoyant or of a vulture.

"The cold numbness of death had already taken possession of his robust body and paralyzed his lips and his arms, and he could not reply even by a word of tenderness to Maria-Gloriosa's wild lamentations and loving appeals. Neither reply nor smile, alas! But his eyes dilated and glistened like the last flame that shoots up from an expiring fire, and were filled with a world of dying thoughts, of divine recollections, of delirious love. They appeared to envelop her in kisses, they spoke to her, they thanked her, they followed her movements, and seemed delighted at her grief. And, as if she were replying to their mute supplications, as if she had understood them, Maria-Gloriosa suddenly tore off her lace, threw aside her fur cloak, and stood erect beside the dying man, whose eyes seemed to devour her, adorable in her supreme beauty, with her bare shoulders, her neck like alabaster, and her fair hair, in which diamonds glistened, surrounding her proud head, like that of the Goddess Diana, the huntress, while she stretched her arms out toward him in an attitude of love, tenderness, and blessing. He gazed at her in ecstasy, he feasted on her beauty, and seemed to be having a terrible struggle with death, in order that he might gaze at her, that apparition of love, a little longer, see her beyond the eternal sleep, and prolong this unexpected vision. And when he felt that all was over with him, and that even his eyes were growing dim, two great tears rolled down his cheeks.

"When Maria-Gloriosa saw that he was dead she piously and devoutly kissed his lips and closed his eyes like a priest, who closes the golden tabernacle at service in the evening after Benediction, and then, without exchanging a word, we returned through the darkness to the palace where the ball was still going on."

* * * * * * *

A minute's silence ensued, and while Madame de Laumières, who was very much touched by this story, and whose nerves were rather high-strung, was drying her tears behind her open fan, suddenly the harsh and shrill voices of the gay women who were returning from the Casino, by the strange irony of fate, struck up an idiotic song which was then in vogue: "Oh, the poor, oh, the poor, oh, the poor, dear girl!"

TRUE FORGIVENESS

BERTHA SAVIGNOL had been brought up in one of those families who live entirely by themselves, apart from the rest of the world. Such households know nothing of political affairs, although they are discussed at table; for changes in the government occur at so great a distance from them that they are spoken of as one speaks of a historical event, such as the death of Louis XVI or the landing of Napoleon.

Customs become modified in course of time, fashions succeed one another, but these variations are not noticed in the placid family circle where traditional usages prevail year after year. And if some scandalous affair occurs in the neighborhood the disreputable story dies a natural death when it reaches the threshold of that house. The father and mother may exchange a few words on the subject when alone together some evening, but they speak in hushed tones—for even walls have ears. The father says, with bated breath:

"Have you heard of that terrible affair in the Rivoil family?"

And the mother answers:

"Whoever would have dreamed of such a thing. It is terrible."

The children suspect nothing, and they arrive in their turn at years of discretion with eyes and minds blindfolded, ignorant of the realities of life, not knowing that people do not think as they speak, nor speak as they act; unaware that they should live at war, or at all events in a state of armed peace, with the rest of mankind; not suspecting the fact that the simple are always deceived, the sincere laughed at, the good maltreated.

Some go on until the day of their death in this blind probity and loyalty and honor, so pure-minded that nothing can open their eyes.

Others, undeceived but without fully understanding, make mistakes, are dismayed, and become desperate, believing themselves the playthings of a cruel fate, the wretched victims of adverse circumstances, and exceptionally wicked.

The Savignols married off their daughter Bertha at eighteen years of age. She wedded a young Parisian, George Baron by name, who was a member of the Stock Exchange. He was handsome, well-mannered, and apparently all that could be desired. But in the depths of his heart he somewhat despised his old-fashioned parents-in-law, of whom he spoke among his cronies as "my dear old fossils."

He belonged to a good family, and the girl was wealthy. They settled to live in Paris, and she

became one of those provincial Parisians whose name is legion. She remained in complete ignorance of the great city, of its social side, its pleasures and its ways—just as she remained ignorant also of life, its perfidy and its mysteries.

Devoted to her home, she knew hardly anything beyond her own street; and when she ventured into another part of Paris it seemed to her that she had accomplished a long and arduous journey into some unknown, unexplored city. She would say to her husband in the evening: "I have been through the boulevards to-day."

Two or three times a year her husband took her to the theater. The remembrance of these events never grew dim; they provided subjects of conversation for a long time.

Sometimes three months later she would suddenly burst into laughter, and exclaim: "Do you remember that actor dressed like a general, who crowed like a cock?"

Her friends were limited to two families related to her own. She spoke of them as "the Martinets" and "the Michelins."

Her husband lived as he pleased, coming home when he pleased—sometimes not until dawn—alleging business to account for the delay, but not putting himself out overmuch to give reasons for his movements, well aware that no suspicion would ever enter his wife's guileless soul.

But one day she received an anonymous letter.

She was thunderstruck, although too simple-minded to understand the infamy of unsigned information and to despise the letter, the writer of which declared himself inspired by interest in her happiness, hatred of evil, and love of truth.

This missive told her that her husband had had for two years a mistress, a young widow named Madame Rosset, with whom he spent all his evenings.

Bertha knew neither how to dissemble her grief nor how to spy upon her husband. When he came home for luncheon she threw the letter down before him, burst into tears, and fled to her room.

He had time to take in the situation and to prepare his reply. He knocked at his wife's door. She opened it at once, but dared not look at him. He smiled, sat down, drew her upon his knee, and in a tone of light raillery began:

"My dear girl, as a matter of fact, I have a friend named Madame Rosset, whom I have known for ten years, and of whom I have a very high opinion. I may add that I know scores of other people whose names I never have mentioned to you, seeing that you do not care for society, or for new acquaintances, or functions of any sort. But, to make short work of such vile accusations as this, I wish you to put on your hat after luncheon, and we will go together and call on this lady, who will very soon become a friend of yours, too, I am quite sure."

She embraced her husband warmly, and, moved by that feminine spirit of curiosity which will not be quieted once it is aroused, she consented to go and see this unknown widow, of whom she was, in spite of everything, the least bit jealous. She felt instinctively that to know a danger is to be already armed against it.

She entered a small, tastefully furnished apartment on the fourth floor of an attractive house. After waiting five minutes in a drawing-room rendered somewhat dark by its many curtains and hangings, a door opened, and a very dark, short, rather plump young woman appeared, surprised and smiling.

George introduced them: "My wife—Madame Julie Rosset."

The young widow uttered a half-suppressed cry of astonishment and joy, and ran forward with hands outstretched. She had not hoped, she said, to have this pleasure, knowing that Madame Baron never saw any one, but she was delighted to make her acquaintance. She was so fond of George (she said "George" in a familiar, sisterly sort of way) that she had been most desirous to know his young wife and to make friends with her, too.

By the end of a month the two new friends were inseparable. They saw each other every day, sometimes twice a day, and dined together every evening, sometimes at one house, sometimes at the other. George no longer deserted his home, no longer

talked of pressing business. He adored his own fireside, he said.

When, after a time, an apartment in the house where Madame Rosset lived became vacant Madame Baron hastened to take it, in order to be near her friend and spend even more time with her than before.

For two whole years their friendship was without a cloud, a friendship of heart and mind—absolute, tender, devoted. Bertha could hardly speak without bringing in Julie's name. To her Madame Rosset represented perfection.

She was entirely happy, calm, and contented.

But Madame Rosset fell ill. Bertha hardly left her side. She spent her nights with her, distracted with grief; even her husband seemed inconsolable.

One morning the doctor, after leaving the invalid's bedside, took George and his wife aside, and told them that he considered Julie's condition very serious.

As soon as he had gone the grief-stricken husband and wife gave way to tears. That night they both sat up with the patient. Bertha kissed her friend tenderly from time to time, while George stood at the foot of the bed, his eyes fixed on the invalid's face.

The next day she was worse, but toward evening she declared she felt better, and insisted that her friends should go back to their own apartments to dinner.

They were sitting sadly in the dining-room, hardly even attempting to eat, when the maid gave George a note. He opened it, turned pale as death, and, rising from the table, said to his wife in a constrained voice:

"Wait for me. I must leave you a moment. I shall return in ten minutes. Don't go away on any account." And he hurried to his room to get his hat.

Bertha waited for him, filled with fresh anxiety. But, obedient in everything, she would not go to her friend till he returned.

At last, as he did not reappear, it occurred to her to visit his room and see whether he had taken his gloves. This would show whether or not he had had a call to make.

She saw them at the first glance. Beside them lay a crumpled paper, evidently thrown down in haste. She recognized it at once as the note George had received, and a burning temptation, the first that ever had assailed her, urged her to read it and discover the cause of her husband's abrupt departure. Her rebellious conscience protested, but a devouring and fearful curiosity prevailed. She seized the paper, smoothed it out, recognized the tremulous, penciled writing as Julie's, and read: "Come alone and kiss me, my poor dear. I am dying."

At first she did not understand, the idea of Julie's death being her uppermost thought. But suddenly the true meaning of what she read burst in a flash

upon her; this penciled note threw a lurid light upon her whole existence, revealed the whole infamous truth, all the treachery and perfidy of which she had been the victim. She understood the long years of deceit, the way in which she had been made their dupe. She saw them again, sitting side by side in the evening, reading out of the same book, glancing at each other at the end of each page.

Her poor, indignant, suffering, bleeding heart sank into the depths of a despair that knew no bounds.

Footsteps drew near; she fled, and shut herself in her own room.

Presently her husband called: "Come quickly! Madame Rosset is dying."

Bertha appeared at her door, and with trembling lips replied: "Go back to her alone; she does not need me."

He looked at her stupidly, dazed with grief, and repeated: "Come at once! She's dying, I tell you!"

"You would rather it were I," Bertha answered.

Then at last he understood, and he returned alone to the dying woman's bedside.

He mourned her openly, shamelessly, indifferent to the sorrow of the wife, who no longer spoke to him, or looked at him; who passed her life in solitude, hedged round with disgust, with indignant anger, and praying night and day.

They still lived in the same house, and sat opposite each other at table, in silence and despair.

Gradually his sorrow grew less acute; but she did not forgive him.

So their life went on, hard and bitter for both. For a whole year they remained as complete strangers to each other as if they never had met. Bertha nearly lost her reason.

At last one morning she went out very early, and returned about eight o'clock bearing in her hands an enormous bouquet of white roses. She sent word to her husband that she wished to speak to him.

He came—anxious and uneasy.

"We are going out together," she said. "Please carry these flowers; they are too heavy for me."

A carriage took them to the gate of the cemetery, where they alighted. Then, her eyes filling with tears, she said: "Take me to her grave."

He trembled, and could not understand her motive; but he led the way, still carrying the flowers. At last he stopped before a white marble slab, to which he pointed without a word. Bertha took the bouquet from him, and, kneeling down, placed it on the grave. Then she offered up a silent, heartfelt prayer.

Behind her stood her husband, overcome by recollections of the past.

She rose, and held out her hands to him.

"If you wish it, we will be friends," she said.

A TWELFTH-NIGHT SUPPER

"WELL, yes, I rather think I do remember that Epiphany supper during the war!" exclaimed the Comte de Garens, an army captain.

I was quartermaster of cavalry at the time, and for a fortnight had been scouting in front of the German advance guard. The evening before that we had killed a few Uhlans and had lost three men, one of whom was that poor little Raudeville. You remember Joseph de Raudeville, of course.

On that day my commanding officer ordered me to take six troopers and to go and occupy the village of Porterin, where there had been five skirmishes in three weeks, and to hold it all night. There were not twenty houses left standing, no not a dozen houses in that wasps' nest. So I took ten troopers and set out about four o'clock, and at five o'clock, while it was still quite dark, we reached the first houses of Porterin. I halted and ordered Marchas—you know Pierre de Marchas, who afterward married little Martel-Auvelin, the daughter of

the Marquis de Martel-Auvelin—to go alone into the village and to report to me what he saw.

I had selected no one but volunteers, all men of good family. It is pleasant when on duty not to be forced to be on intimate terms with unpleasant fellows. This Marchas was as shrewd as possible, clever as a fox and supple as a serpent. He could scent the Prussians as a dog scents a hare, could discover food where we should have died of starvation without him, and he obtained information from everyone—information which was always reliable—with incredible cleverness.

In ten minutes he returned: "It is all right," he said; "no Prussians have been here for three days. It is a gloomy place, this village. I have been talking to a Sister of Mercy, who is caring for four or five wounded men in an abandoned convent."

I ordered them to ride on, and we entered the principal street. To right and left we could vaguely see roofless walls, barely visible in the profound darkness. Here and there a light was burning in a room; some family had remained to keep its house standing as well as they were able; a family of brave or of poor people. The rain began to fall, a fine, icy-cold rain, which froze as it fell on our cloaks. The horses stumbled against stones, against beams, against furniture. Marchas guided us, walking before us and leading his horse by the bridle.

"Where are you taking us?" I inquired.

"I know a place to stay, and a fine one, too," he said.

Presently we stopped before a small house, evidently belonging to some person of the middle class. It stood on the street, but was entirely closed in, and had a garden in the rear.

Marchas broke the lock with a large stone which he picked up near the garden-gate; then he mounted the steps, forced in the front door with his feet and shoulders, lighted a bit of wax candle, which he never was without, and preceded us into the comfortable apartments of some rich private family, guiding us with admirable assurance, as if he lived in this house, which he now saw for the first time.

Two troopers stayed outside to look after our horses, and Marchas said to fat Ponderel, who followed him: "The stables must be on the left; I saw that as we came in; go and put the horses up there, for we do not need them;" then, turning to me, he said: "Give your orders, hang it all!"

This fellow Marchas always astonished me, and I replied laughing: "I will post my sentinels at the country approaches and will return to you here."

"How many men shall you take?"

"Five. The others will relieve them at five o'clock in the evening."

"Very well. Leave me four to look after provisions, to cook, and to set the table. I will go and find where the wine is hidden."

I went off and reconnoitered the deserted streets until they ended in the open country, so as to post my sentries.

Half an hour later I returned and found Marchas lolling in a great arm-chair, the covering of which he had taken off, from love of luxury, as he said. He was warming his feet at a fire and smoking an excellent cigar, the perfume of which filled the room. He was alone, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, his cheeks flushed, his eyes bright, and looking delighted.

I heard the sound of plates and dishes in the next room, and Marchas said to me, smiling happily: "This is famous; I found the champagne under the flight of steps outside, the brandy—fifty bottles of the finest kind—in the kitchen garden under a pear-tree which did not look to me to be quite straight, when I looked at it by the light of my lantern. As for food, we have two fowls, a goose, a duck, and three pigeons, which are being cooked at this moment. This is a delightful part of the country."

I sat down opposite him, and the fire in the grate burned my nose and cheeks. "Where did you find this wood?" I asked. "Excellent wood," he replied. "The owner's carriage. It is the paint that causes all this flame—an essence of punch and varnish. A capital house, this!"

I laughed, for really the fellow was amusing, and he continued: "Fancy this being the Epiphany! I have had a bean put into the goose dressing, but there is no queen; it is really very annoying!"

I repeated like an echo: "It *is* annoying, but what do you wish me to do in the matter?"

"To find some, of course."

"Some women? Women?—you must be crazy!"

"I managed to find the brandy under the pear-tree," he said, "and the champagne under the steps; although I had nothing to guide me; while as for you, a petticoat is a sure sign. Go and look, old fellow."

He looked so grave, so convinced, that I could not tell whether he was joking or not, and so I replied: "See here, Marchas, are you playing a joke on me?"

"I never joke on duty."

"But where the deuce do you expect me to find any women?"

"Where you like; there must be two or three remaining in the neighborhood, so ferret them out and bring them here."

I arose, for it was too hot in front of the fire, and Marchas continued: "Do you want an idea?"

"Yes."

"Go and see the priest."

"The priest? What for?"

"Ask him to supper, and beg him to bring a woman with him."

"The priest? A woman? Ha! ha! ha!"

But Marchas proceeded with extraordinary gravity: "I am not laughing; go and find the priest and tell him how we are situated, and, as he must be horribly dull, he will surely come. But tell him that we want one woman at least—a lady, of course,

since we are all men of the world. He is sure to have the names of his woman parishioners on the tips of his fingers, and if there is one to suit us, and you manage it well, he will tell her name."

"Come, Marchas, what are you thinking of?"

"My dear Garens, you can do this quite well. It will really be very amusing. We are well bred, I hope, and we will put on our most distinguished manners and our grandest style. Tell the priest who we are, make him smile, melt his heart, coax him and persuade him!"

"No, it is impossible."

Marchas drew his chair close to mine, and as he knew my particular weakness, the rascal continued: "Just think what a fine thing it will be to do, and how amusing to tell about; the whole army will talk about it, and it will give you a famous reputation."

I hesitated, for the adventure certainly tempted me, and he persisted: "Come, my little Garens. You are the head of this detachment, and you alone can go and call on the representative of the Church in this neighborhood. I beg of you to go, and I promise you that after the war I will relate the whole affair in verse in the *Revue de Deux Mondes*. You owe this much to your men, for you have made them march enough during the last month."

I sprang up at last and asked: "Where is the priest's house?"

"Take the second turning at the end of the street;

you will see an avenue, and at the end of the avenue you will find the church. The rectory is beside it."

As I went out, he called: "Tell him our *menu,* to make him hungry!"

I found the ecclesiastic's little house without any difficulty; it was close beside a large, ugly brick church. I knocked at the door with my fist, as there was neither bell nor knocker, and a loud voice from inside asked: "Who is there?" "A quartermaster of hussars," I replied.

I heard the sound of bolts and of a key being turned, and found myself face to face with a tall priest with a large stomach, the chest of a prize-fighter, formidable hands projecting from turned-up sleeves, a red face, and the look of a benevelolent person. I gave him a military salute and said: "Good day, Monsieur le Curé."

He had feared a surprise, some marauders' ambush, and he smiled as he replied: "Good day, my friend; come in."

I followed him into a little room with a red tiled floor, in which a small fire was burning, very different from Marchas' furnace, and he gave me a chair and said: "What can I do for you?"

"Monsieur, allow me first to introduce myself;" and I gave him my card, which he took and read half aloud: "Le Comte de Garens."

"There are eleven of us here, Monsieur l'Abbé," I continued; "five on picket duty, and six installed at the house of an unknown inhabitant. The names

of the six are: Garens, myself, Pierre de Marchas, Ludovic de Ponderel, Baron d'Etreillis, Karl Massouligny, the painter's son, and Joseph Herbon, a young musician. I have come to ask you, in their name and my own, to honor us by taking supper with us. It is an Epiphany supper, Monsieur le Curé, and we should like to make it a little cheerful."

The priest smiled and murmured: "It appears to me to be hardly a suitable occasion for amusing oneself."

"We are fighting to-day, Monsieur," I replied. "Fourteen of our comrades have been killed in a month, and three fell as recently as yesterday. That is war. We stake our life every moment; have we not, therefore, a right to amuse ourselves freely? We are Frenchmen, we like to laugh, and we can laugh everywhere. Our fathers laughed on the scaffold! This evening we should like to cheer ourselves a little, like gentlemen, and not like soldiers; you understand me, I hope. Are we wrong?"

"You are quite right, my friend," he replied quickly; "and I accept your invitation with great pleasure." Then he called out: "Hermance!"

An old bent, wrinkled, hideous peasant woman appeared and said: "What do you want?"

"I shall not dine at home, my daughter."

"Where shall you dine, then?"

"With some gentlemen, hussars."

I felt inclined to say: "Bring your servant with

you," just to see Marchas' face, but I did not venture, and inquired: "Do you know anyone among your parishioners, male or female, whom I could invite also?" He hesitated, reflected, then said: "No, I do not know anyone!"

"Nobody?" I persisted; "come, Monsieur, think; it would be very pleasant to have some ladies—I mean to say, some married couples! I know nothing about your parishioners. The baker and his wife, the grocer, the—the—the—watchmaker—the—shoemaker—the—the chemist with Madame Chemist. We have a good supper and plenty of wine, and we should be enchanted to leave pleasant recollections of ourselves with the people here."

The priest thought again for a long time, and then said resolutely: "No, there is no one."

I began to laugh. "Monsieur le Curé, it is very annoying not to have an Epiphany queen, for we have a bean. Come, think. Is there not a married mayor, or a married deputy mayor, or a married municipal councillor, or a schoolmaster?"

"No, all the ladies have gone away."

"What? Is there not in the whole place some good tradesman's wife with her good tradesman, to whom we might give this pleasure—for it would be a pleasure to them, a great pleasure under present conditions."

Suddenly the curé began to laugh; he laughed so violently that he fairly shook, and presently he exclaimed: "Ha! ha! ha! I have what you want.

Yes, I have what you want! Ha! ha! ha! We will laugh and enjoy ourselves, my children; we will have some sport. How pleased the ladies will be—I say, how delighted they will be! Ha! ha! . . . Where are you staying?"

I described the house, and he understood where it was. "Very good," he said. "It belongs to Monsieur Bertin-Lavaille. I shall be there in half an hour, with four ladies! Ha! ha! ha! four ladies!"

He went out with me, still laughing, and left me, repeating: "That is capital; in half an hour at Bertin-Lavaille's house."

I returned quickly, very much astonished and puzzled. "Covers for how many?" Marchas asked, as soon as he saw me.

"Eleven. There are six of us hussars, besides the priest and four ladies."

He was amazed, and I was triumphant. He repeated: "Four ladies! Did you say four ladies?"

"I said four women." "Real women?"

"Yes, real women." "Pray accept my compliments!"

"I will, for I deserve them."

Marchas got out of his armchair, opened the door, and I saw a beautiful white tablecloth on a long table, round which three hussars in blue aprons were setting plates and glasses. "Some women are coming!" Marchas cried. The three men began to dance and cheer with all their might.

Everything was ready, and we were waiting. We waited for nearly an hour, while a delicious odor of roast fowls pervaded the whole house. At last, however, a knock against the shutters made us all jump up at the same moment. Fat Ponderel ran to open the door, and in less than a minute a little Sister of Mercy appeared in the doorway. She was thin, wrinkled, and timid, and successively saluted the four bewildered hussars who saw her enter. Behind her, the noise of canes sounded on the tiled floor in the vestibule, and as soon as she had entered the drawing-room, I beheld three old heads in white caps, following one another; they entered, balancing themselves with different movements, one inclining to the right, while another leaned to the left. And three worthy women showed themselves, limping, dragging their legs behind them, crippled by illness and deformed through old age, three infirm old women, past all service, the only three pensioners who were able to walk in the establishment which Sister Saint-Benedict managed.

She had turned round to her invalids, full of anxiety for them, then, seeing my quartermaster's stripes, she said to me: "I am much obliged to you for thinking of these poor women. They have very little pleasure in life, and you are at the same time giving them a great treat and doing them a great honor."

I looked at the priest, who had remained in the obscurity of the passage; he was laughing heartily,

and I began to laugh in my turn, especially when I saw Marchas' face. Then, motioning the nun to the seats, I said: "Sit down, sister; we are very proud and happy that you have accepted our unpretentious invitation."

She took three chairs which stood against the wall, set them before the fire, led her three old women to them, settled them comfortably, took their sticks and shawls, which she put into a corner, and then, pointing to the first, a thin woman with an enormous stomach, who was evidently suffering from dropsy, she said: "This is Mother Paumelle, whose husband was killed by falling from a roof, and whose son died in Africa; she is sixty years old." Then she pointed to another, a tall woman, whose head trembled incessantly: "This is Mother Jean-Jean, who is sixty-seven. She is nearly blind, for her face was terribly singed in a fire, and her right leg was half burned off."

Then she pointed to the third, a sort of dwarf, with protruding, round, stupid eyes, which she rolled in all directions. "This is La Putois, an idiot. She is only forty-four."

I bowed to the three women as if I were being presented to some royal highnesses, and turning to the priest, I said: "You are an excellent man, Monsieur l'Abbé, to whom all of us here owe a debt of gratitude."

Everyone was laughing, in fact, except Marchas, who seemed furious, and just then Karl Massou-

ligny cried: "Sister Saint-Benedict, supper is on the table!"

I made her go first with the priest, then I helped up Mother Paumelle, whose arm I took, and I dragged her into the next room, which was no easy task, for she seemed heavier than a lump of iron.

Stout Ponderel gave his arm to Mother Jean-Jean, who bemoaned her crutch, and little Joseph Herbon took the idiot, La Putois, to the dining-room, which was filled with the odor of the food.

As soon as we were seated, the sister clapped her hands three times, and, with the precision of soldiers presenting arms, the women made a swift sign of the cross, and the priest slowly repeated the *Benedictus* in Latin. Then the two fowls appeared, brought in by Marchas, who chose to wait at table rather than to sit down as a guest of this ridiculous repast.

But I cried: "Bring the champagne at once!" A cork flew out with the noise of a pistol, and in spite of the resistance of the priest and of the kind sister, the three hussars, sitting beside the three invalids, poured their three full glasses down the guests' throats by force.

Massouligny, who possessed the faculty of making himself at home, and of being on good terms with everyone, wherever he was, made love to Mother Paumelle in the drollest manner. The dropsical woman, who had retained her cheerfulness in spite of her misfortunes, answered him ban-

teringly in a high falsetto voice which appeared as if it were affected, and she laughed so heartily at her neighbor's jokes that it was quite alarming. Little Herbon had seriously undertaken the task of making the idiot drunk, and Baron d'Etreillis, whose wits were not always particularly sharp, was questioning old Jean-Jean about the life, the habits, and the rules in the hospital.

The nun said to Massouligny in consternation: "Oh! you will make her ill; pray do not make her laugh like that, Monsieur. Oh! Monsieur——" She rose and rushed at Herbon to take a full glass out of his hands which he was hastily pouring down La Putois' throat, while the priest shook with laughter and said to the sister: "Never mind; just this once, it will not hurt her. Do leave them alone."

After the two fowls they ate the duck, which was flanked by the three pigeons and the blackbird, and then the goose appeared, smoking, golden-brown, and diffusing a warm odor of hot, browned roast meat. La Paumelle, who was getting lively, clapped her hands; La Jean-Jean left off answering the Baron's numerous questions, and La Putois uttered grunts of pleasure, half cries and half sighs, as little children do when one shows them candy. "Allow me to take charge of this animal," the *curé* said. "I understand this sort of operation better than most people."

"Certainly, Monsieur l'Abbé," and the sister said: "How would it do to open the window? They are too warm, and I fear they will be ill."

I turned to Marchas: "Open the window for a minute." He did so; the cold outer air as it came in made the candles flare, and the steam from the goose, which the priest was carving scientifically, with a table napkin round his neck, whirl about. We watched him carve, without speaking, for we were interested in his attractive handiwork, and were seized with renewed appetite at the sight of that enormous golden-brown bird, whose limbs fell one after another into the brown gravy at the bottom of the dish. At that moment, in the midst of the greedy silence which kept us all attentive, the distant report of a shot came in at the open window.

I started to my feet so quickly that my chair fell down behind me, and I shouted: "To saddle, all of you! You, Marchas, take two men and go and see what it is. I shall expect you back here in five minutes." And while the three riders went off at full gallop through the night, I got into the saddle with my three remaining hussars, in front of the steps of the villa, while the priest, the sister and the three old women showed their frightened faces at the window.

We heard nothing more, except the barking of a dog in the distance. The rain had ceased, and it was very cold; and soon I heard the gallop of a single horse coming back. It was Marchas, and I called out to him: "Well?"

"It is nothing; François has wounded an old

peasant who refused to answer his challenge: 'Who goes there?' and who continued to advance in spite of the order to keep off; but they are bringing him here, and we shall see what is the matter."

I gave order for the horses to be put back in the stable, and I sent my two soldiers to meet the others, and returned to the house. Then the priest, Marchas, and I took a mattress into the room to lay the wounded man on; the sister tore up a table napkin in order to make lint, while the three frightened women remained huddled in a corner.

Soon I heard the rattle of sabers on the road, and took a candle to show a light to the men who were returning. They soon appeared, carrying that inert, soft, long, sinister object which a human body becomes when life no longer sustains it.

They put the wounded man on the mattress that had been prepared for him, and I saw at the first glance that he was dying. He had the death-rattle and was spitting up blood, which ran out of the corners of his mouth, forced out of his mouth by his gasps. The man was covered with blood! His cheeks, his beard, his hair, his neck and his clothes seemed to have been soaked, to have been dipped in a red tub; and the blood stuck to him, and had become a dull color which was horrible to look at.

The wounded man, wrapped in a large shepherd's cloak, occasionally opened his dull, vacant eyes, which seemed stupid with astonishment, like those of animals wounded by a sportsman, which

fall at his feet, more than half dead already, stupefied with fear and astonishment.

The priest exclaimed: "Ah, that is old Placide, the shepherd from Les Marlins. He is deaf, poor man, and heard nothing. Ah! God! they have killed the poor man!" The sister had opened his blouse and shirt, and was looking at a little blue hole in the middle of his chest, which was not bleeding any more. "There is nothing to be done," she said.

The shepherd was gasping terribly and bringing up blood with every breath, and in his throat, to the very depth of his lungs, they could hear an ominous and continued gurgling. The priest, standing in front of him, raised his right hand, made the sign of the cross, and in a slow and solemn voice pronounced the Latin words which purify men's souls, but before they were finished the old man was shaken by a rapid shock, as if something had given way inside him; he no longer breathed. He was dead.

When I turned round, I saw a sight even more horrible than the death-struggle of this unfortunate man; the three old women were standing huddled close together, hideous and grimacing with fear and horror. I went up to them, and they began to utter shrill screams, while La Jean-Jean whose burned leg could not longer support her, fell to the ground at full length.

Sister Saint-Benedict left the dead man, ran up

to her infirm old women, and, without a word or a look at me, wrapped their shawls round them, gave them their crutches, pushed them to the door, made them go out, and disappeared with them into the dark night.

I saw that I could not even let a hussar accompany them, for the mere rattle of a sword would have sent them mad with fear.

The priest was still looking at the dead man; but at last he turned round to me and said:

"Oh! What a horrible thing!"

FATHER MATTHEW'S SAINTS

WE had left Rouen and were galloping along the road to Jumièges, the light carriage seeming to fly across the level country. Presently the horse slackened his pace to walk up the hill of Canteleu.

From that point one sees one of the most magnificent views in the world. Behind us lay Rouen, the city of churches, with its Gothic belfries, sculptured like ivory bijoux; before us was Saint Sever, the manufacturing suburb, with its thousands of smoking chimneys rising against the expanse of sky, opposite the many sacred steeples of the old city.

On the one hand the spire of the cathedral, the highest of human monuments, on the other the engine of the power-house, its rival, almost as high, and a meter higher than the tallest pyramid in Egypt.

Before us wound the Seine with its scattered islands and bordered by white cliffs crowned by a forest on the right, and on the left vast meadows bordered by another forest.

Here and there large ships lay at anchor along the banks of the wide river. Three great steamers were setting out, one behind another, for Havre, and a chain of boats, a three-master, two schooners, and a brig, were going up to Rouen, towed by a little tug, which belched forth a cloud of black smoke.

My companion, a native of the country, did not appear to admire this wonderful landscape as I did, but he smiled continually, and he seemed to be amused at his thoughts. Suddenly he said:

"Ah, you will see something amusing—Father Matthew's chapel. That is a rare sight, my friend."

I looked at him in surprise.

"I will give you a taste of Normandy," he continued, "that you will remember. Father Matthew is the handsomest Norman in the province and his chapel is one of the wonders of the world, beyond doubt. But first I will give you a few words of explanation.

"Father Matthew, who is called also Father La Boisson, is an old sergeant-major who has come back to his native land. He combines in admirable proportions, making a perfect whole, the humbug of the old soldier and the sly malice of the Norman. On his return to Normandy, thanks to influence and incredible cleverness, he became doorkeeper of a votive chapel, which was dedicated to the Virgin and frequented chiefly by young women who have gone wrong. He christened the wonderful statue

there 'Our Lady of Increase,' and bears himself toward it with a certain familiarity that still does not lack respect. He composed and had painted a special prayer to his 'Good Virgin.' This prayer is a masterpiece of unintentional irony, of Norman wit, in which jest is blended with fear of the saint and with the superstitious fear of some secret influence. He has not much faith in his saint, but he believes in her a little through prudence, and he is courteous to her through policy.

"This is how this remarkable prayer begins:

" 'Our good Lady, the Virgin Mary, natural Patroness of unmarried mothers in this land and everywhere on the earth, protect your servant who has done wrong in a moment of forgetfulness!'

"It ends thus:

" 'Do not forget me, especially when you are with your holy Spouse, and intercede with God the Father that he may give me a good husband, like your own.'

"This prayer, which was suppressed by the clergy of the district, is sold by him privately, and is said to be very efficacious for those who recite it with unction.

"In fact, he speaks of the good Virgin as the valet of a redoubtable prince might talk of his master, who has confided in him all his little secrets. He has a number of amusing anecdotes at his own expense, which he tells confidentially among friends as they sit over their wine.

"But you will see for yourself.

"As the fees coming from the Virgin did not appear sufficient to him, he added to the saint a little business in other saints. He has them all, or nearly all. There was not room enough in the chapel, so he stored them in the woodshed and brings them forth when a faithful devotee asks for them. He has made these little wooden statues himself—they are comical in the extreme—and painted them all a vivid green one year when they were painting his house. You know that saints cure diseases, but each one has his specialty, and you must not confuse them or make any errors, for they are as jealous of one another as actors.

"In order that they may make no mistake, the old women come and consult Matthew.

" 'Which saint is the best for troubles of the ear?' they ask.

" 'Well, there is Saint Osyme who is very good; and there is also Saint Pamphilius, who is not at all bad,' he answers.

"That is not all, either. When Matthew has time to rest, he drinks. But he drinks like an artist, one that is sure of himself, so much so that he is drunk regularly every evening. He is drunk, but he knows it; indeed, he knows it so well that he notes each day the exact degree of his drunkenness. It is his principal occupation—the chapel comes afterward.

"He has invented,—understand this and don't forget it,—a drinking-gauge. The instrument does

not really exist, but Matthew's observations are as precise as those of a mathematician. You will hear him say every day:

" 'Since Monday, I have passed forty-five,' or, 'I was between fifty-two and fifty-eight,' or, 'I had sixty-six to seventy,' or, perhaps, 'Ah! you rascal, I believed I was in the fifties, and here I find I had seventy-five!'

"He never deceives himself. He says that he has not yet completed the meter, but, as he avows that his observations cease to be precise after he has passed ninety, one cannot absolutely rely upon his affirmation.

"When Matthew recognizes that he has passed ninety, be sure that he is really intoxicated. On these occasions, his wife, Mélie, another marvel, works herself into a great rage. She waits for him at the door when he enters and cries: 'Here you are, you dirty pig, you drunken good-for-nothing.'

"Then Matthew, no longer laughing, plants himself before her, and in severe tones says: 'Hush, Mélie, this is no time to talk. Wait till to-morrow.'

"If she undertakes the next day to return to the with trembling voice says: 'Talk no more; I am in the nineties; I can no longer measure; I may hurt someone; take care!'

"Then Mélie beats a retreat.

"If she undertakes the next day to return to the subject, he laughs in her face and answers: 'Come, come! enough of that; that is past. So long as I

have not reached the limit, there is no harm. But if I pass it, I will allow you to punish me, I promise you.'

We had gained the summit of the hill. The route lay through the beautiful forest of Roumare. The autumn, the marvelous autumn, mingled her gold and purple with the latest verdure, still a living green, that sparkled as if some drops of sunlight had been strained down from the sky into the thickest of the wood.

We crossed Duclair; then, instead of continuing toward Jumièges, my friend turned toward the left and, taking a crossroad, struck into the wood. And soon, from the top of a great hill, we discovered anew the magnificent valley of the Seine and the tortuous river itself, winding at our feet.

At the right, a little building, with a slate roof and a clock-tower as high as an umbrella, leaned against a pretty house of vivid green, covered with honeysuckle and roses.

A resonant voice cried: "Here are some friends!" And Matthew appeared at the door. He was about sixty years of age, thin, wearing a pointed beard and a long, white moustache. My companion seized his hand and introduced me. Matthew showed us into a clean kitchen, which served also as a living-room.

"Monsieur," said Matthew, "I have no distinguished apartment. I like better not to get too far from the eatables. The stewpans, you see, are

company." Turning toward my friend, he added:

"Why have you come on a Thursday? You know well that this is the day of consultation with my Patroness. I cannot go out this afternoon."

Running to the door, he uttered a tremendous bawl. "Mé-li-ee!" which might have raised the hair of the sailors in the ships passing up and down the river at the bottom of the valley.

Mélie did not answer.

Matthew winked a cunning eye with: "She is not pleased with me, you see, because yesterday I reached the nineties."

My neighbor began to laugh. "In the nineties, Matthew! How was that?"

Matthew answered: "I will tell you. Last year I found only twenty baskets of apricots. That was not enough to do anything with, but in order to make some cider we must take what we have. I made a little, and yesterday I tapped it. Talk about nectar, that is nectar; you will say so, too. I had Polyte here. We took a cup, and then another cup, without satisfying ourselves, for one could drink that till to-morrow. I drank so much, cup after cup, that I felt chilly in my stomach. I said to Polyte: 'If we should take a glass of brandy, now, it would warm us up.' He consented. But brandy—that put a fire in my body, so hot that it was necessary to return to the cider. So there it was! Coolness after heat and heat after coolness, until I saw that I was in the nineties."

The door opened. Mélie appeared, and immediately, before she said "Good morning" to us, exclaimed: "Pigs! You were far beyond the limit, both of you!"

Matthew was angry, but he answered: "Don't say so, Mélie, don't say so; I never have been beyond my limit."

They gave us a delightful meal, before the door, under two lindens, beside the little chapel of "Our Lady of Increase," with a beautiful landscape before us. And Matthew related to us, with raillery mingled with credulity, some unlikely stories of miracles.

We had drunk much of the wonderful cider, pungent and sweet, cool and powerful, which he preferred to all liquids, and were smoking our pipes, sitting astride our chairs, when two good women presented themselves.

They were old, withered, and bent. After bowing to us, they asked for Saint Blanc. Matthew winked his eye at us, and said:

"I will get him for you." And he disappeared into the woodshed.

He stayed there five minutes, then came back his face filled with consternation. Raising his hands he declared:

"I don't know where he is. I can not find him, though I am sure I had him!" Making a trumpet of his hands, he called: "Mélie!"

From the end of the garden his wife answered: "What is it?"

"Where is Saint Blanc? I can't find him in the shed?"

Mélie came back and made this explanation:

"Wasn't it Saint Blanc you took last week to stop the hole in the shed to keep out the wolves?"

Matthew started. "Heavens, yes! that is true!"

Then he said to the two women: "Follow me."

They followed. We almost choked with laughter. For Saint Blanc, stuck in the earth as a simple stake, stained with mud and filth, was actually serving in one corner of the shed to keep out the wolves.

When they perceived him, the two good women fell on their knees, crossed themselves, and began to murmur their *oremus*. Matthew hurried to them. "Wait," said he, "you are in the dirt there; I will bring you some straw."

So he went to find some straw and made them a prayer-cushion. Then, seeing that his saint was muddy, and believing, no doubt, that that would be bad for the trade, he added: "I will clean him up a bit."

He took a pail of water and a brush and began to wash the wooden saint vigorously, while the two old ladies continued to pray.

When he had finished, he said: "Now, there is nothing wrong," and he brought us more drink.

As he lifted the cup to his lips, he stopped, and with a confused air said: "It is true; when I put Saint Blanc there to keep out the wolves, I believed

surely that I should never get any money for him. It has been two years since there has been any call for him. But the saints, you see, they never die."

He drank and continued:

"Come, let us drink another cup. With friends it is not necessary to stop at less than the fifties, and I am only at thirty-eight."

THE BIT OF STRING

IT was market-day, and from all the countryside round about Goderville the farmers and their wives were approaching the town. The men walked slowly, throwing the whole body forward at every step of their long, bent legs. They were deformed from pushing the plow, which makes the left shoulder higher than the right, and bends the figure to one side; and from reaping the grain, when they have to spread their legs to keep on their feet. Their starched blue blouses, glossy as if varnished, ornamented at collar and cuffs with a little embroidered design and blowing out around their bony bodies, looked very much like balloons about to soar, from which projected two arms and two feet.

Some of these peasants dragged a cow or a calf at the end of a rope, and behind the animal followed their women, beating it over the back with a leafy branch to hasten its pace, and carrying large baskets out of which protruded the heads of chickens or ducks. These women walked more quickly and energetically than the men, with their erect, with-

ered figures adorned with scanty little shawls pinned over their flat chests, and their heads wrapped round with a white cloth, enclosing the hair and surmounted by a cap.

A char-à-banc passed by, jogging behind an old horse and shaking up the two men on the seat, and the woman at the bottom of the cart who held fast to its sides to lessen the effect of the hard jolting.

In the market-place at Goderville was a great throng, a mingled multitude of men and beasts. The horns of cattle, the high, long-napped hats of well-to-do peasants, the headdresses of the women, came to the surface of that sea of heads. And the sharp, shrill, barking voices made a continuous, wild din; while above it occasionally rose a great burst of laughter from the sturdy lungs of a merry peasant or a prolonged bellow from a cow tied fast to the side of a house.

The air smelled of the stable, of milk, of hay, and of perspiration, with that half-human, half-animal odor peculiar to country folks.

Maître Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, had just arrived at Goderville and was making his way toward the square when he perceived on the ground a little piece of string. Maître Hauchecorne, economical as are all true Normans, remembered that everything was worth picking up that could be of any use, and he stooped, but painfully, because he suffered from rheumatism. He took the bit of thin string from the ground and was preparing to roll it

up carefully when he saw Maître Malandain, the harness-maker, on his doorstep staring at him. They had once had a quarrel about a halter, and had borne each other ill-will ever since. Maître Hauchecorne was overcome with a sort of shame at being seen by his enemy picking up a bit of string in the road. He hid it quickly under his blouse and slipped it into his trousers' pocket, then pretended to be still looking for something on the ground which he did not discover, and finally went off toward the market-place, his head held forward and his body almost bent in two by rheumatic pains.

He was at once lost in the crowd, which kept moving about slowly and noisily as it chaffered and bargained. The peasants examined the cows, went away, came back, always in doubt for fear of being cheated, never quite daring to decide, looking the seller square in the eye in the effort to discover the tricks of the man and the defect in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, had taken out the poultry, which lay upon the ground, their legs tied together, with terrified eyes and scarlet combs.

These women listened to propositions, maintaining their prices in a decided manner with an impassive face, or perhaps deciding to accept the smaller price offered, suddenly calling out to the customer who was about to go away:

"Very well, I'll let you have them, Maît' Anthime."

Little by little, the square became empty, and when the Angelus struck midday those who lived at a distance poured into the inns.

At Jourdain's the great room was filled with diners, as the vast court was filled with vehicles of every kind—wagons, gigs, chars-à-bancs, tilburies, innumerable vehicles which have no name, yellow with mud, misshapen, tied together, raising their shafts to heaven like two arms, or with the front on the ground and the rear in the air.

Opposite the spot where the diners were at table the huge fireplace, with its bright flame, gave out a burning heat on the backs of those who sat at the right. Three spits were turning, loaded with chickens, pigeons, and legs of mutton, and a delectable odor of roast meat, and of gravy flowing over crisp brown skin, arose from the hearth, kindled merriment, and caused mouths to water.

All the aristocracy of the plow were eating there at Maître Jourdain's, the innkeeper's, a dealer in horses also and a sharp fellow who had made much money in his time.

The dishes were passed and were emptied, as were the jugs of yellow cider. Everyone told of his affairs, his purchases and his sales. They exchanged news about the crops. The weather was good for green food, but too wet for grain.

Suddenly the drum began to beat in the courtyard before the house. Everyone, except some of the most indifferent, was on his feet at once and ran

to the door, to the windows, with mouth full and napkin in hand.

When the public crier had finished his tattoo he called in a jerky voice, pausing in the wrong places:

"Be it known to the inhabitants of Goderville, and in general to all persons present at the market, that there has been lost this morning on the Beuzeville road, between nine and ten o'clock, a black leather pocketbook containing five hundred francs and business papers. You are requested to return it to the mayor's office at once or to Maître Fortuné Houlbrèque, of Manneville. There will be twenty francs' reward."

Then the man went away. They heard once more at a distance the dull beating of the drum and the faint voice of the crier. They all began to talk of this incident, reckoning up the chances which Maître Houlbrèque had of finding or of not finding his pocketbook again.

The meal proceeded. The guests were finishing their coffee when the corporal of gendarmes appeared on the threshold.

"Is Maître Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, here?" he asked.

Maître Hauchecorne, seated at the other end of the table, answered: "Here I am, here I am."

And he followed the corporal.

The mayor was waiting for him, seated in an armchair. He was the notary of the place, a tall, grave man of pompous speech.

"Maître Hauchecorne," said he, "this morning, on the Beuzeville road, you were seen to pick up the pocketbook lost by Maître Houlbrèque, of Manneville."

The countryman looked at the mayor in amazement, frightened already at this suspicion that rested on him, he knew not why.

"I—I picked up that pocketbook?"

"Yes, you."

"I swear I don't know anything about it."

"You were seen."

"I was seen—I? Who saw me?"

"Monsieur Malandain, the harness-maker."

Then the old man remembered, understood, and, growing red with anger, said:

"Ah! he saw me, did he, the rascal? He saw me picking up this string here, M'sieu le Maire."

And fumbling at the bottom of his pocket, he pulled out of it the little piece of string.

But the mayor shook his head incredulously, saying:

"You will not make me believe, Maître Hauchecorne, that Monsieur Malandain, who is a man whose word can be believed, has mistaken this string for a pocketbook."

The peasant, furious, raised his hand and spat on the ground beside him as if to attest his good faith, repeating:

"For all that, it is God's truth, M'sieu le Maire. There! On my soul's salvation, I repeat it."

"After you picked up the object in question," the mayor continued, "you even looked about for some time in the mud to see whether a piece of money had not dropped out of it."

The good man was choking with indignation and fear.

"How can they tell—how can they tell such lies as that to slander an honest man! How can they?"

His protestations were useless; he was not believed. He was confronted with Monsieur Malandain, who repeated and sustained his testimony. They railed at each other for an hour. At his own request Maître Hauchecorne was searched. Nothing was found on him.

At last the mayor, much perplexed, sent him away, warning him that he would inform the public prosecutor and ask for orders.

The news had spread. When he left the mayor's office the old man was surrounded, interrogated with a curiosity which was serious or mocking, as the case might be, but into which no indignation entered. And he began to tell the story of the bit of string. No one believed him. They only laughed.

He passed on, intercepted by everyone, himself stopping his acquaintances and beginning over and over again his tale and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out to prove that he had nothing in them.

"You old rogue!" they said to him.

He grew more and more angry, feverish, in despair at not being believed, and kept on telling his story.

Night came. It was time to go home. He left with three of his neighbors, to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the string, and all the way he talked of his adventure. That evening he made the round of the village of Bréauté for the purpose of telling everyone. He met only unbelievers.

All night long he brooded over it.

The next day, about one o'clock in the afternoon, Marius Paumelle, a farm-hand of Maître Breton, the market-gardener at Ymauville, returned the pocketbook and its contents to Maître Holbrèque, of Manneville.

This man said, indeed, that he had found it on the road, but not knowing how to read, he had carried it home and given it to his master.

The news spread to the environs, Maître Hauchecorne was informed. He set off at once and began to relate his story with the dénoûement. He was triumphant.

"What grieved me," said he, "was not the thing itself, do you understand—it was the being accused of lying. Nothing does one so much harm as being in disgrace for lying."

All day he talked of his adventure. He told it on the roads to the people who passed, at the cabaret to the people who drank, and the next Sunday

when they came out of church. He even stopped strangers to tell them about it. His mind was easy now, and yet something worried him without his knowing exactly what it was. People had a jocular manner while they listened, and did not seem convinced. He seemed to feel their mocking remarks behind his back.

On Tuesday of the following week he went to market at Goderville, prompted solely by the need of repeating his story.

Malandain, standing on his doorstep, began to laugh as he saw him pass. Why?

He accosted a farmer of Criquetot, who did not let him finish, but gave him a punch in the pit of the stomach, crying: "Oh, you big rascal!" Then he turned his back upon him.

Maître Hauchecorne remained speechless and grew more and more uneasy. Why had they called him "big rascal"?

When seated at table in Jourdain's tavern he began again to explain the whole affair.

A horse-dealer of Montivilliers shouted at him:

"Shut up, you old rogue! I know all about your bit of string."

"But since they found it again, the pocket-book . . . " Hauchecorne stammered.

"Hold your tongue, daddy," the other continued; "there's one who finds it and there's another who returns it. And no one is the wiser."

The farmer was speechless. He understood at

last. They accused him of having had the pocket-book brought back by an accomplice, a confederate.

He tried to protest, but the whole table began to laugh. He could not finish his dinner, and went away amid a chorus of jeers.

He went home indignant, choking with rage, with confusion, the more cast down since with his Norman craftiness he was, perhaps, capable of having done what they accused him of and even of boasting of it as a good trick. He was dimly conscious that it was impossible to prove his innocence, his craftiness being so well known, but he felt cut to the heart by the injustice of the suspicion.

He began anew to tell his tale, lengthening his recital every day, each day adding new proofs, more energetic declarations and more sacred oaths, which he thought of and prepared in his hours of solitude, for his mind was entirely occupied with the story of the string. The more he denied the accusation, the better his arguments, the less he was believed.

"Those are liars' proofs," they said behind his back.

He felt this. It preyed upon him and he exhausted himself in useless efforts.

He was visibly wasting away. Jokers would make him tell the story of "the bit of string" to amuse them, as one makes a soldier who has been on a campaign tell his story of the battle. His mind kept growing weaker, and about the end of December he took to his bed.

He passed away early in January, and, in the ravings of death agony, he protested his innocence, repeating:

"A little bit of string—a little bit of string. See, here it is, M'sieu le Maire."

THE MINUET

THE greater misfortunes of life do not affect me very much," said Jean Bridelle, an old bachelor who passed for a skeptic. "I have seen war at close quarters; I have walked across corpses without any feeling of pity. The great brutal facts of nature, or of humanity, may call forth cries of horror or indignation, but they do not cause us that tightening of the heart, that shudder that goes down your spine at sight of certain little heartrending episodes.

"The greatest sorrow that anyone can experience is certainly the loss of a child, to a mother; and to a man, the loss of his mother. It is intense, terrible, it rends your heart and upsets your mind; but one is healed of these shocks, as deep bleeding wounds become healed. Certain meetings, things half perceived, or surmised, certain secret sorrows, and tricks of fate, which awake in us a whole world of painful thoughts, suddenly unclosing to us the mysterious door of moral suffering, complicated, incurable—all the deeper because they appear benign,

all the more bitter because they are intangible, all the more tenacious because they appear almost factitious—leave in our souls a sort of trail of sadness, a taste of bitterness, a feeling of disenchantment, from which it takes a long time to free ourselves.

"I have always present to my mind two or three things that others would probably not have noticed, but which penetrated my being like fine, sharp incurable stings.

"You might not perhaps understand the emotion that I retained from these hasty impressions. I will tell you one of them. The principal figure of interest was very old, but as lively as a young girl. It may be that my imagination alone is responsible for my emotion.

"I am fifty years old, but I was young then and studying law. I was rather sad, somewhat of a dreamer, full of a pessimistic philosophy, and did not care much for noisy cafés, boisterous companions, or stupid girls. I rose early, and one of my chief pleasures was to walk alone about eight o'clock in the morning in the nursery garden of the Luxembourg.

"You people never knew that nursery garden. It was like a forgotten garden of the last century, as pretty as the gentle smile of an elderly woman. Thick hedges divided the narrow regular walks, peaceful paths between two walls of carefully trimmed foliage. The gardener's great shears were pruning unceasingly these leafy partitions, and here

and there one came across beds of flowers, lines of little trees looking like schoolboys out for a walk, companies of magnificent rose-bushes, or regiments of fruit-trees.

"A whole corner of this charming spot was occupied by bees. Their straw hives skilfully arranged at distances on boards, had their entrances—the size of the opening of a thimble—turned toward the sun; and all along the paths one encountered these humming, gilded flies, the true masters of this peaceful spot, the real wayfarers along these quiet paths.

"I went there almost every morning. I sat down on a bench and read; sometimes I let my book fall on my knees, to dream, to listen to the life of Paris around me, and to enjoy the infinite repose of those old-fashioned hedges. But I soon perceived that I was not the only one to frequent this spot as soon as the gates were opened, and occasionally I met face to face, at a turn in the path, a strange little old man.

"He wore shoes with silver buckles, knee-breeches, a snuff-colored frock-coat, a lace jabot, and an extraordinary gray hat, with wide brim and long-haired surface, which might have come out of the Ark.

"He was very thin, angular, grimacing and smiling. His bright eyes moved restlessly beneath his eyelids, which blinked continuously. He always carried in his hand a superb cane with a gold head,

which must have been for him some glorious souvenir.

"This good man astonished me at first, then caused me the intensest interest. I watched him through the leafy walls, I followed him at a distance, stopping at a turn in the hedge so as not to be seen.

"One morning when he thought he was quite alone, he began to make the most remarkable motions. First he made some little springs, then made a bow; then, with his slim legs, he would give a lively spring in the air, clapping his feet together as he did so, and then turn round briskly, skipping and frisking about in a comical manner, smiling as if he had an audience, twisting his poor little puppet-like body, bowing pathetic and ridiculous little greetings into the empty air. He was dancing.

"I stood petrified with amazement, asking myself which of us was mad, he or I.

"He stopped suddenly, advanced as actors do on the stage, then bowed and retreated with gracious smiles, and kissing his trembling hand as actors do, to the two rows of trimmed bushes.

"Then he continued his walk with a solemn demeanor.

"After that I never lost sight of him, and every morning he began anew his strange exercises.

"I was wildly desirous to speak to him. I decided to risk it, and one day, after greeting him, I said:

" 'It is a beautiful day, Monsieur.'

"He bowed with all the grace of an old courtier.

" 'Yes, Monsieur, the weather is just as it used to be.'

"A week later we were friends and I knew his history. He had been a dancing-master at the Opéra, in the time of Louis XV. His beautiful cane was a present from the Comte de Clermont. And when we spoke about dancing he never stopped talking.

"One day he said to me:

" 'I married La Castris, Monsieur. I will introduce you to her if you wish it, but she does not come here till later. This garden, you see, is our delight and our life. It is all that remains of former days. It seems as if we could not exist if we did not have it. It is old and elegant, is it not? I seem to breathe an air here that has not changed since I was young. My wife and I pass all our afternoons here, but I come in the morning because I rise early.'

"As soon as I had finished luncheon I returned to the Luxembourg, and presently perceived my friend offering his arm ceremoniously to a very old little lady dressed in black, to whom he presented me. It was indeed La Castris, the great dancer, beloved by princes, beloved by the King, beloved by all that century of gallantry that seems to have left behind it in the world an atmosphere of love.

"We sat down on a bench. It was the month of May. An odor of flowers floated in the trim paths; a hot sun shed its rays among the branches and

covered us with patches of light. The black gown of La Castris seemed to be saturated with sunlight.

"The garden was empty. We heard the rattling of vehicles in the distance.

" 'Tell me,' I said to the old dancer, 'what was the minuet?'

"He started.

" 'The minuet, Monsieur, is the queen of dances, and the dance of queens, do you understand? Since there is no longer any royalty, there is no longer any minuet.'

"And he began in a pompous manner a long dithyrambic eulogy which I could not understand. I wished to have the steps, the movements, the positions, explained to me. He became confused, was amazed at his inability to make me understand, became nervous and worried.

"Then suddenly, turning to his old companion who had remained silent and serious, he said:

" 'Élise, would you like—say—would you like—it would be very nice of you—would you like to show this gentleman what it was?' "

"She turned her eyes uneasily in all directions, then rose without saying a word and took her position opposite him.

"Then I witnessed an unheard-of thing.

"They advanced and retreated with childlike grimaces, smiling, swinging each other, bowing, skipping about like two automaton dolls moved by some old mechanical contrivance, somewhat dam-

aged, but made by a clever workman according to the fashion of his time.

"I looked at them, my heart filled with extraordinary emotions, my soul touched with an indescribable melancholy. I seemed to see before me a pathetic and comical apparition, the out-of-date ghost of a former century.

"Suddenly they stopped. They had finished all the figures of the dance. For some seconds they stood opposite each other, smiling in an astonishing manner. Then they fell on each other's neck, sobbing.

"Three days later I left for the provinces. I never saw them again. When I returned to Paris, two years later, the nursery garden had been destroyed. What became of them, deprived of the dear garden of former days, with its mazes, its odor of the past, and the graceful windings of its hedges?

"Are they dead? Are they wandering among modern streets like hopeless exiles? Are they dancing—grotesque spectres—a fantastic minuet in the moonlight, amid the cypresses of a cemetery, along the pathways bordered by graves?

"Their memory haunts me, obsesses me, torments me, remains with me like a wound. Why? I do not know.

"No doubt you think that very absurd?"

THE RELICS

THE distinguished citizen received a grand public funeral, such as they give to victorious soldiers who have added some glorious pages to the annals of their country, who have restored courage to despondent rulers and flung the proud shadow of the flag over other nations like a yoke under which those must pass who are deprived of country or of liberty. Who knows whether tall cavalry soldiers, in their cuirasses, sitting motionless as statues on their horses during an entire bright, calm night, when falling stars make one think of unknown metamorphoses and the transmigration of souls, had not watched by the dead man's coffin, which was resting, covered with wreaths, under the porch of the heroes, every stone of which is engraved with the name of a brave man and of a battle?

The whole town was in mourning, as if it had lost the only object that had possession of its heart and which it loved. The crowd went silently and thoughtfully down the Avenue of the Champs Ely-

sées, and they almost fought for the commemorative medals and the common portraits which hawkers were selling, or climbed upon the stands which street boys had erected here and there, and whence they could see over the heads of the crowd. The Place de la Concorde had a solemn air about it, with its circle of statues draped from head to foot with long crape coverings, which made them look in the distance like widows, weeping and praying.

According to his last wish, Jean Ramel had been conveyed to the Pantheon in the wretched paupers' hearse which carries them to the common grave behind the shambling trot of some thin and broken-winded horse.

That dreadful black conveyance, without any drapery, without plumes or flowers, which was followed by ministers and deputies, by several regiments with their bands and their flags flying above the helmets and the sabres, by children from the national schools, by delegates from the provinces, and an innumerable crowd of men in blouses, of women, of shopkeepers from every quarter, had a most theatrical effect; while standing on the steps of the Pantheon, at the foot of the massive columns of the portico, the orators successively descanted on the apotheosis of the deceased, tried to make their voices predominate over the noise, emphasized their pompous periods, and finished the performance by a poor third act like those which make peo-

ple yawn and gradually empty the theater. People remembered who that man had been on whom these posthumous honors were being bestowed, and who was having such a funeral; it was Jean Ramel.

Those three sonorous syllables called up a leonine head, with white hair thrown back in disorder, like a mane; with features that looked as if they had been cut out with a knife, but were so powerful and contained such a flame of life that one forgot their vulgarity and ugliness; with black eyes under bushy eyebrows, which dilated and flashed like lightning, at one moment veiled as by tears and again filled with serene mildness; a voice which now was so gruff as almost to terrify its hearers, and which would have filled the hall of some working man's club full of thick smoke from strong pipes, without being affected by it, and then, would be soft, coaxing, persuasive, and unctuous, like that of a priest who is holding out promises of Paradise or giving absolution for our sins.

He had had the good luck to be persecuted; to be in the eyes of the people the incarnation of that lying formula which appears on every public edifice, of those three words of the Golden Age, which make those who think, those who suffer, and those who govern, smile somewhat sadly—Liberty, Fraternity, Equality. Luck had been kind to him, had sustained, had pushed him on by the shoulders, and had set him up on his pedestal again when he had fallen, as all idols do fall.

He spoke and wrote, and always to announce the good news to all the multitudes who suffered—no matter to what grade of society they might belong —to hold out his hand to them and to defend them, to attack the abuses of the Code—that book of injustice and severity—to speak the truth boldly, even when it lashed his enemies as with a whip.

His books were like gospels that are read, chapter by chapter, warming the most despairing and sorrowing hearts, and bringing comfort, hope and dreams to each.

He had lived very modestly until the end, and appeared to spend nothing; and he kept only one old servant, who spoke to him in the Basque dialect.

This chaste philosopher, who had all his life long feared women's snares and wiles, who had looked upon love as a luxury made only for the rich and idle, one which unsettles the brain and interferes with acuteness of thought, had allowed himself to be caught like any ordinary man—late in life, when his hair was white and his forehead deeply wrinkled.

It was not, however, as happens in the visions of solitary ascetics, some strange queen or female magician, with stars in her eyes and witchery in her voice; some loose woman who held up the symbolical lamp immodestly, to light up her radiant nudity and the pink-and-white bouquet of her perfumed skin, some woman in search of voluptuous

pleasures, whose lascivious appeals it is impossible for any man to listen to without being excited to the very depths of his being. Neither was it a princess out of some fairy-tale, nor a frail beauty who was an expert in the art of awakening the emotions of old men and of leading them astray, nor a woman who was disgusted with her ideals, that always turned out to be alike, and who dreamed of awakening the soul of one of those men who suffer, one of those who have afforded so much alleviation to human misery, who seem to be surrounded by a halo, and who never know anything but the true, the beautiful, and the good.

It was only a little girl of twenty, who was as pretty as a wild flower, who had a ringing laugh, white teeth, and a mind that was as spotless as a new mirror in which no figure had been reflected.

He was in exile at the time for having given public expression to his opinions, and was living in an Italian village which was buried in chestnut-trees and on the shores of a lake that was so narrow and transparent that it might have been taken for some nobleman's fish-pond, and looked like an emerald in a large park. It consisted of about twenty red-tiled houses. Steep paths paved with flint led up the side of the hills among the vines, where the Madonna, full of grace and goodness, extended her indulgence from shrines which contained dusty, tinsel nosegays.

For the first time in his life, Ramel remarked

that there were some lips that were more desirable, more smiling than others, that there was hair in which it must be delicious to bury the fingers as in fine silk, and which it must be delightful to kiss, and that there were eyes which contained an infinitude of caresses, and he had spelled right through the eclogue, which at length revealed true happiness to him, and he had had a child, a son, by her.

This was the only secret that Ramel jealously concealed, and which no more than two or three of his oldest friends knew anything about; and while he hesitated about spending five centimes on himself, and went to the Institute and to the Chamber of Deputies on the outside of an omnibus, pretty Pepa led the happy life of a millionaire who is not afraid of to-morrow, and brought up her son like a little prince, with a tutor and three servants, who had nothing to do but to look after him.

All that Ramel made went into her hands, and when he felt that his last hour was approaching, and that there was no hope of his recovery—in full possession of his faculties and with joy in his dull eyes—he gave his name to Pepa, and made her his lawful widow, in the presence of all his friends. She inherited everything that he left behind—a considerable income from his share of the annual profits on his books, and also his pension, which the State continued to pay to her.

Little Ramel throve wonderfully amid all this luxūry, and gave free scope to his instincts and his

caprices, without his mother ever having the courage to reprove him in the least. He did not bear the slightest resemblance to Jean Ramel.

Full of pranks, effeminate, a superfine dandy, and precociously vicious, he suggested the idea of those pages at the Court of Florence, whom we frequently meet with in the *Decameron,* and who were the playthings of patrician ladies.

He was very ignorant, and lived at a great pace, bet on races, and played cards for heavy stakes with seasoned gamblers old enough to be his father. And it was distressing to hear this lad joke about the memory of him whom he called "the old man," and persecute his mother because of the worship and adoration which she felt for Jean Ramel, of whom she spoke as if he had become a demigod when he died, as in Roman theogony.

He would have liked to alter entirely the arrangement of that kind of sanctuary, the drawing-room, where Pepa kept some of her husband's manuscripts, the furniture that he had most frequently used, the bed on which he had died, his pens, his clothes, and his weapons. And one evening not knowing how to dress himself up more originally than the rest for a masked ball that stout Toinette Danicheff was going to give as her housewarming, without saying a word to his mother, he took down the Academician's dress, the sword and cocked hat that had belonged to Jean Ramel, and put it on as if it had been a disguise on Shrove Tuesday.

Slightly built, and with thin arms and legs, the wide clothes hung loosely on him, and he was a comical sight, with the embroidered skirt of his coat sweeping the carpet, and his sword knocking against his heels. The elbows and the collar were shiny and greasy from wear, for the Master had worn it until it was threadbare, to avoid having to buy another, and never thought of replacing it.

He made a tremendous hit, and fair Liline Ablette laughed so at his grimaces and his disguise that that night she threw over Prince Noureddin for him, although he had paid for her house, her horses, and everything else, and allowed her six thousand francs a month—for extras and pocket-money!

A FARM GIRL'S STORY

I

THE weather was fine, and so the people on the farm had hurried through dinner and returned to the fields.

Rose, the maid-servant, remained alone in the large kitchen, where the fire was dying down on the hearth under the boiler of hot water. At times she dipped out some water and slowly washed the dishes, stopping occasionally to look at the two streaks of light thrown by the sun across the long table through the window, which showed the defects in the glass.

Three venturesome fowls were picking up the crumbs under the chairs, while the odor of the poultry-yard and the warmth from the cow-stable came through the half-open door, and a cock was heard crowing in the distance.

When Rose had finished her work, wiped off the table, dusted the mantelpiece, and put the plates on the high dresser close to the wooden clock with its loud tic-tac, she drew a long breath, as she felt rather oppressed, without exactly knowing

why. She looked at the black clay walls, the rafters, blackened with smoke, from which hung spiders' webs, smoked herrings, and strings of onions; and then she sat down, rather overcome by the stale odor from the earthen floor, on which so many things had been continually spilled, and which the heat brought out. With this was mingled the sour smell of the pans of milk that were set out in the adjoining dairy to raise the cream.

She wanted to sew, as usual, but did not feel strong enough; so she went to the door to get a mouthful of fresh air, which seemed to do her good.

The fowls lay on the steaming dunghill; some were scratching in search of worms, while the cock stood proudly among them. When he crowed, the cocks in all the neighboring farmyards replied to him, as if they were uttering challenges from farm to farm.

The girl looked at them without thinking, and then she raised her eyes, and was almost dazzled at the sight of the apple-trees in full bloom. Just then, a colt, full of life and friskiness, jumped over the ditches, and stopped suddenly, as if surprised at being alone.

Rose, too, felt inclined to run; she wanted to move and stretch her limbs, and to rest in the warm, breathless air. She took a few undecided steps, and closed her eyes, for she was seized with a feeling of animal well-being; and then she went

to look for eggs in the hen-loft. She found thirteen, which she put into the storeroom; but the smell from the kitchen annoyed her again, and she went out to sit on the grass.

The farmyard, which was surrounded by trees, appeared to be asleep. The tall grass, amid which the yellow dandelions rose like spots of yellow light, was of a vivid, fresh spring green. The apple-trees cast their shade all round, and the thatched roofs, on which grew blue and yellow irises, with swordlike leaves, steamed as if the moisture of the stables and barns were oozing through the straw.

The girl went to the shed, where the carts and buggies were kept. Close beside it, in a ditch, there was a large patch of violets, whose fragrance spread abroad, while beyond the slope the open country could be seen, where grain was growing, with clumps of trees and groups of laborers here and there, who looked as small as dolls, and white horses, like toys, which seemed to be drawing a child's cart, driven by a man as tall as one's finger.

She took up a bundle of straw, threw it into the ditch, and sat down upon it; then, not feeling comfortable, she opened it, spread it out, and lay down upon it at full length, on her back, with both arms under her head and her feet stretched out.

Gradually her eyes closed, and she was falling into a state of delightful languor. She was, in fact, almost asleep, when she felt two hands on her breast, and she sprang up at a bound. It was Jacques, one of the farm laborers, a tall fellow

from Picardy, who had been making love to her for a long time. He had been herding the sheep, and, seeing her lying down in the shade, had come up stealthily and holding his breath, with glistening eyes, and bits of straw in his hair.

He tried to kiss her, but she gave him a slap in the face, for she was as strong as he, and he was wise enough to beg her pardon; so they sat down side by side, and talked amicably. They spoke about the fine weather, of their master, who was a good fellow, then of their neighbors, of all the people in the country round, of themselves, their village, their youthful days, their recollections, and of their relatives, who had left them for a long time, it might be forever. She grew sad as she thought of it, while he, with one fixed idea in his head, drew closer to her.

"I have not seen my mother for a long time," she said. "It is very hard to be separated like this"—and she directed her looks into the distance, toward the village in the north which she had left.

Suddenly, however, Jacques seized her by the neck and kissed her again; but she struck him so violently in the face with her clenched fist that his nose began to bleed, and he got up and leaned his head against the trunk of a tree. When she saw that, she was sorry, and, going up to him, she said: "Have I hurt you?" But he only laughed. "No, it was a mere nothing; only you struck me right on the middle of the nose. What a devil!"

he said, and he looked at her with admiration, for she had inspired him with a feeling of respect, and of a very different kind of admiration, which was the beginning of a real love for that tall, strong damsel.

When the bleeding had stopped, he proposed to take a walk, as he was afraid of his neighbor's heavy hand should they remain side by side like that any longer; but she took his arm of her own accord, in the avenue, as if they had been out for an evening stroll, and said: "It is not kind of you to despise me like that, Jacques." But he protested that he did not despise her. He was in love with her, that was all.

"Do you really want to marry me?" she asked.

He hesitated, and then looked at her sidewise, while she looked straight ahead of her. She had plump, red cheeks, a full bust beneath her cotton jacket, thick, red lips; and her neck, which was almost bare, was covered with small beads of perspiration. He felt a fresh access of desire, and, putting his lips to her ear, he murmured: "Yes, of course I do."

Then she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him till both were out of breath. From that moment the eternal story of love began between them. They teased one another in corners; they met in the moonlight beside the haystack, and gave each other bruises on the legs, under the table, with kicks of their heavy nailed boots. By degrees,

however, Jacques began to grow tired of her; he avoided her, hardly spoke to her, and did not try any longer to meet her alone, which made her sad and anxious; and soon she found that she was *enceinte*.

At first, she was in a state of consternation; then she got angry, and her rage increased every day because she could not speak to him, as he avoided her carefully. At last, one night, when every one in the farmhouse was asleep, she went out noiselessly in her petticoat, with bare feet, crossed the yard, and opened the door of the stable where Jacques was lying in a large box of straw above his horses. He pretended to snore when he heard her coming, but she knelt by his side, and shook him until he sat up.

"What do you want?" he asked. With set teeth, and trembling with anger, she replied: "I want— I want you to marry me, as you promised." But he only laughed, and replied: "Oh, if a man were to marry all the girls with whom he has made a slip, he would have more than enough to do."

Then she seized him by the throat, threw him on his back, so that he could not get away from her, and, half strangling him, she shouted into his face: "I am *enceinte,* do you hear? I am *enceinte!*"

He gasped for breath, as he was almost choked, and so they remained, both of them, motionless and without speaking, in the silent darkness, which was broken only by the noise made by a horse as he

pulled the hay out of the manger and slowly chewed it.

When Jacques found that she was the stronger, he stammered: "Very well, I will marry you, if that is the case."

But Rose did not believe him. "It must be at once," she said. "You must have the banns put up." "Yes, at once," he replied.

"Swear solemnly that you will."

He hesitated a few seconds, and then said: "I swear it, by Heaven."

Then she released her grasp, and went away without another word.

She had no chance of speaking to him for several days; and, as the stable was now always locked at night, she was afraid to make any noise, for fear of creating a scandal. One morning, however, she saw another man come in at dinner-time, and asked: "Has Jacques gone?" "Yes," the man replied; "I have his place."

This made her tremble so violently that she could not take the saucepan off the fire; and, later, when they were all at work, she went up to her room and wept, burying her head in her pillow, that she might not be heard. During the day, however, she tried to obtain some information without exciting any suspicion, but she was so overwhelmed by the thought of her misfortune that she fancied all the people she asked laughed maliciously. All she learned, however, was that he had left for good.

II

Then a cloud of constant misery descended upon her. She worked mechanically, without thinking of what she was doing, with one fixed idea in her head: "Suppose people were to know."

This continual feeling made her so incapable of reasoning that she did not even try to think of any means of avoiding the disgrace that she knew must come, which was irreparable and drawing nearer every day, and which was as sure as death itself. She rose every morning long before the others, and persistently tried to look at her figure in a piece of broken looking-glass, before which she combed her hair, as she was very anxious to know whether anyone would notice a change in her; and during the day she stopped working every few minutes to look at herself from top to toe, to see whether her apron did not look too short.

Months rolled on, and she hardly spoke now; when she was asked a question she did not appear to understand; but she had a frightened look, haggard eyes, and trembling hands, which made her master say to her occasionally: "My poor girl, how stupid you have grown lately!"

In church she hid behind a column, and no longer dared to go to confession, as she feared to face the priest, to whom she attributed superhuman powers, which enabled him to read people's consciences; at meal-times, the looks of her fellow

servants almost made her faint with mental agony; and she was always fancying that she had been found out by the cowherd, a precocious and sharp little lad, whose bright eyes seemed always to be watching her.

One morning the postman brought her a letter; and, as she never had received one in her life before, she was so agitated by it that she was obliged to sit down. Could it be from him? But, as she could not read, she sat anxious and trembling with that piece of paper, covered with ink, in her hand; after a time, however, she put it into her pocket, as she did not dare confide her secret to any one. She often stopped in her work to look at those lines written at regular intervals, and terminating in a signature, imagining vaguely that she would suddenly discover their meaning, until, at last, as she felt half mad with impatience and anxiety, she went to the schoolmaster, who bade her sit down, and read as follows:

"My Dear Daughter: I write to tell you that I am very ill. Our neighbor, Monsieur Dentu, begs you to come, if you can.

"From your affectionate mother.

Césaire Dentu, Deputy Mayor."

She did not say a word, and went away; but, as soon as she was alone, her legs gave way under her; she fell by the roadside, and lay there till nightfall.

When she returned, she told the farmer her bad news, and he allowed her to go home for as long as she liked, promising to have her work done by a charwoman and to take her back when she returned.

Her mother died soon after she reached home, and, the next day Rose gave birth to a seven-months' infant, a miserable little skeleton, thin enough to make one shudder; it appeared to be suffering continually, to judge from the painful manner in which it moved its poor little hands, thin as a crab's legs; but it lived for all that. She said she was married, but could not be burdened with the child, so she left it with some neighbors, who promised to take care of it, and she went back to the farm.

And now in her heart, which had been wounded so long, something like brightness arose, a mysterious love for that frail little creature she had left behind her, though there was fresh suffering in that very love, suffering which she felt every hour and every minute, because she was separated from her child. What hurt her most, was the mad longing to kiss it, to press it in her arms, to feel the warmth of its little body against her breast. She could not sleep at night; she thought of it all day long, and in the evening, when her work was done, she would sit before the fire and gaze at it intently, as people do whose thoughts are far away.

Her companions began to talk about her, and to

tease her about her lover. They asked her whether he was tall, handsome, and rich. When was the wedding to be, and the christening? And often she ran away, to weep by herself, for these questions hurt her like the prick of a pin; and, in order to forget their jokes, she worked even harder, and, still thinking of her child, she sought some way of saving money for it, and determined to work so hard that her master would be obliged to raise her wages.

By degrees, she almost monopolized the farm work, and persuaded the farmer to get rid of one maid-servant, who had become useless since Rose herself had taken to working like two; she economized in the bread, the oil, and the candles; in the corn, which she said they gave to the chickens too extravagantly, and in the fodder for the horses and cattle, which was certainly wasted. She was as miserly about her master's money as if it were her own; and, by dint of making good bargains, of getting high prices for all their produce, and by baffling the peasants' tricks when they offered anything for sale, the master at last entrusted Rose with buying and selling everything, with the direction of all the laborers, and the purchase of food necessary for the household; so that in a short time she became indispensable to him. She kept such a sharp eye on everything about her that, under her direction, the farm prospered wonderfully and for five miles round people talked of "Master Val-

lin's servant," and the farmer himself said everywhere: "That girl is worth more than her weight in gold."

But time passed, and her wages remained the same. Her hard work was accepted as something that was due from every good servant, and as a mere evidence of good will; and she began to think rather bitterly that if the farmer could put fifty or a hundred crowns extra into the bank every month, thanks to her efforts, she was still only earning her two hundred francs a year, not a franc more nor less; so she made up her mind to ask for an increase of wages. She went to see the schoolmaster three times about it, but when she got there, she spoke about something else, for she felt a kind of modesty in asking for money, as if it were something disgraceful. But at last, one day when the farmer was breakfasting by himself in the kitchen, she said to him with some embarrassment that she wished to speak to him particularly. He raised his head in surprise, with both hands on the table, holding his knife, point in the air, in one hand and a piece of bread in the other, and he looked fixedly at the girl, who felt uncomfortable under his gaze, but asked for a week's holiday, so that she might go away, as she was not very well. He granted her request immediately, and added, in some embarrassment himself:

"When you come back, I shall have something to say to you."

III

Rose's child was nearly eight months old, and she did not recognize it. It had grown rosy and chubby all over, like a little roll of fat. She threw herself on it, as if it had been some prey, and kissed it so violently that it began to scream with terror; and then she began to weep herself, because it did not know her and held out its arms to its nurse as soon as it saw her. But the next day it began to know her, and laughed when it saw her, and she took it into the fields, and ran about excitedly with it, sitting down at last under the shade of the trees; and then, for the first time in her life, she opened her heart to some one, and told the baby her troubles; how hard her work was, how heavy her anxieties, how bright her hopes; and she quite wearied the child with the violence of her caresses.

She took the greatest pleasure in handling it, in washing and dressing it, for it seemed to her that all this was the confirmation of her maternity, and she would look at it, almost feeling surprised that it was hers, and would say to herself in a low voice, as she danced it in her arms: "It is my baby, my own baby."

She wept all the way home, as she returned to the farm, and had hardly arrived before her master called her into his room; she went, feeling astonished and nervous, without knowing why.

"Sit down," he said. She sat, and for some moments they remained silent, in embarrassment, with their arms hanging at their sides, as if they did not know what to do with them, and looking each other in the face, after the manner of peasants.

The farmer, a stout, jovial, obstinate man of forty-five, who had lost two wives, evidently felt embarrassed, which was very unusual with him; but at last he made up his mind, and began to speak vaguely, hesitating a little, and looking out of the window as he talked. "How is it, Rose," he said, "that you never have thought of settling in life?"

She grew as pale as death, and, seeing that she gave him no answer, he continued: "You are a good, steady, active, and economical girl; and a wife like you would make a man's fortune."

She did not move, but looked frightened; she did not even try to comprehend his meaning, for her thoughts were in a whirl, as if at the approach of some great danger; so, after waiting for a few seconds, he proceeded: "You see, a farm without a mistress never can succeed, even with a servant like you." Then he paused, for he did not know what else to say, and Rose looked at him with the air of a person who thinks that he is face to face with a murderer, and is ready to flee at the slightest movement he may make; but, after waiting for about five minutes, he asked her: "Well, will it suit you?" "Will what suit me, master?" "Why, to marry me, by Heaven!" said he quickly.

She sprang up, but fell back on her chair, as if she had been struck, and there she remained motionless, like a person overwhelmed by some great misfortune. At last, the farmer grew impatient, and said: "Come, what more do you want?" She looked at him, almost in terror; then, suddenly, the tears came into her eyes, and she said twice, in a choking voice: "I cannot, I cannot!" "Why not?" he asked. "Come, don't be foolish; I will give you until to-morrow to think it over."

And he hurried out of the room, very glad to have got through with the matter, which had troubled him a good deal; for he had no doubt that she would the next morning accept a proposal which she never could have expected, and which would be a capital bargain for him, as he thus bound a woman to his interests who would certainly bring him more profit than if she had the best dowry in the district.

Neither could there be any scruples about an unequal match between them, for in the country every one is very nearly the social equal of everyone else; the farmer works just as his laborers do, who frequently become masters in their turn, and the female servants often become the mistresses of the establishments without this making any change in their life or habits.

Rose did not go to bed that night, but threw herself, dressed as she was, on her bed; she had not even strength to weep left in her, she was so

thoroughly astounded. She remained quite inert, hardly knowing that she had a body, and without being able to collect her thoughts, though, at moments, she remembered something of what had happened, and then she was alarmed at the idea of what might happen. Her terror increased, and every time the great kitchen clock struck the hour she broke into a perspiration from grief. She became bewildered, and had nightmare; her candle went out, and then she began to imagine that some one had cast a spell over her, as country people so often imagine, and she felt a mad inclination to run away, to escape and flee before her misfortune, like a ship scudding before the wind.

An owl hooted; she shivered, sat up, passed her hands over her face, her hair, and all over her body; then she went downstairs, as if she were walking in her sleep. When she went into the yard she stooped, so as not to be seen by any prowling tramp, for the moon, which was setting, shed a bright light over the fields. Instead of opening the gate she scrambled over the fence, and as soon as she was outside she set off. She went straight before her, with a quick, springy trot, and from time to time she unconsciously uttered a piercing cry. Her long shadow accompanied her, and now and then some night bird flew over her head, while the dogs in the farmyards barked as they heard her pass; one even jumped over the ditch and followed her and tried to bite her, but she turned round at

it and gave such a terrible yell that the frightened animal ran back and cowered in silence in its kennel.

The stars grew dim, and the birds began to twitter; day was breaking. The girl was exhausted and panting; and when the sun rose in the purple sky she stopped, for her swollen feet refused to go any farther; but she saw a pond in the distance, a large pond whose stagnant water looked like blood under the reflection of this new day, and she limped on with short steps and her hand on her heart, in order to dip both her feet in it. She sat down on a tuft of grass, took off her heavy shoes, which were full of dust, pulled off her stockings and plunged her legs into the still water, from which bubbles were rising here and there.

A feeling of delicious coolness pervaded her from head to foot, and suddenly, while she was looking fixedly at the deep pool she was seized with dizziness, and with a mad longing to throw herself into it. All her sufferings would be over in there, over for ever. She no longer thought of her child; she only wanted peace, complete rest, and to sleep for ever, and she got up with raised arms and took two steps forward. She was in the water up to her thighs, and she was just about to throw herself in when sharp, pricking pains in her ankles made her jump back, and she uttered a cry of despair, for, from her knees to the tips of her feet, long black leeches were sucking her lifeblood, and were swell-

ing as they adhered to her flesh. She did not dare to touch them, and screamed with horror, so that her cries of despair attracted a peasant, who was driving along at some distance, to the spot. He pulled off the leeches one by one, applied herbs to the wounds, and drove the girl to her master's farm in his gig.

She was in bed for a fortnight, and as she was sitting outside the door on the first morning that she got up, the farmer suddenly came and planted himself before her. "Well," he said, "I suppose our affair is settled, isn't it?" She did not reply at first, and then, as he remained standing and looking at her intently with his piercing eyes, she said with difficulty: "No, master, I cannot." He immediately flew into a rage.

"You cannot, girl; you cannot? I should like to know the reason why?" She began to cry, and repeated: "I cannot." He looked at her, and then exclaimed angrily: "Then I suppose you have a lover?" "Perhaps that is it," she replied, trembling with shame.

The man got as red as a poppy, and stammered out in a rage: "So you confess it, you hussy! And pray who is the fellow? Some penniless, half-starved ragamuffin, without a roof to his head, I suppose? Who is it, I say?"

Rose gave him no answer, and he continued: "Ah! So you will not tell me. . . . Then I will tell you; it is Jean Bauda."

"No, not he!" she exclaimed.

"Then it is Pierre Martin." "Oh! no, master."

He mentioned angrily all the young fellows in the neighborhood, while she denied that he had hit upon the right one, and every moment wiped her eyes with the corner of her blue apron. But he still tried to find it out, with his brutish obstinacy, scratching at her heart as it were, to discover her secret, as a terrier scratches at a hole to get at the animal he scents inside it. Suddenly, however, the man shouted: "By Jove! It is Jacques, the man who was here last year. They used to say that you were always talking together, and that you thought about getting married."

Rose was choking, and she grew scarlet, while her tears suddenly stopped and dried up on her cheeks, like drops of water on hot iron, and she exclaimed: "No, it is not he, it is not he!" "Is that really a fact?" asked the cunning peasant, who partly guessed the truth; and she replied, hastily: "I will swear it; I will swear it to you—" She tried to think of something by which to swear, as she did not venture to invoke sacred things, but he interrupted her: "At any rate, he used to follow you into every corner and devoured you with his eyes at meal-times. Did you ever give him your promise, eh?"

This time she looked her master straight in the face. "No, never, never; I will solemnly swear to you that if he were to come to-day and ask me to

marry him I would have nothing to do with him." She spoke with such an air of sincerity that the farmer hesitated, and then he continued, as if speaking to himself: "What, then? You have not had *a misfortune,* as they call it, or it would have been known, and as it has no consequences, no girl would refuse her master on that account. There must be something at the bottom of it, however."

She could say nothing; she had not strength to speak, and he asked her again: "You will not?" "I cannot, master," she said, with a sigh, and he turned on his heel.

She thought she had got rid of him altogether and spent the rest of the day almost tranquilly, but was as exhausted as if she had been turning the thrashing machine all day in the place of the old white horse, and she went to bed as soon as she could and fell asleep immediately. In the middle of the night, however, two hands touching the bed woke her. She trembled with fear, but immediately recognized the farmer's voice, when he said to her: "Don't be frightened, Rose; I have come to speak to you." She was surprised at first, but when he tried to take liberties with her she understood and began to tremble violently, as she felt quite alone in the darkness, still heavy from sleep, and quite unprotected with that man standing near her. She certainly did not consent, but she resisted carelessly, struggling against that instinct which is always strong in simple natures and very imperfectly

protected by the undecided will of inert and gentle races. She turned her head to the wall, and now toward the room, in order to avoid the attentions which the farmer tried to press on her, but she was weakened by fatigue, while he became brutal, intoxicated by desire.

They lived together for a time as man and wife, and one morning he said to her: "I have put up our banns and we will be married next month."

She did not reply, for what could she say? She did not resist, for what could she do?

She married him. She felt as if she were in a pit with inaccessible sides from which she could never get out, with all kinds of misfortunes hanging over her head, like huge rocks, which would fall on the first occasion. Her husband gave her the impression of a man whom she had robbed, and who would find it out some day or other. And she thought of her child, who was the cause of her misfortunes, but who was also the cause of all her happiness on earth, and whom she went to see twice a year, though she came back more unhappy each time.

But she gradually grew accustomed to her life, her fears were allayed, her heart was at rest, and she lived with an easier mind, though still with some vague fear floating in it. So time went on, until the child was six years old. She was almost happy now, when suddenly the farmer's temper grew very bad.

For two or three years he seemed to have been nursing some secret anxiety, to be troubled by some care, some mental disturbance, which was gradually increasing. He remained sitting at table after dinner, with his head in his hands, sad and devoured by sorrow. He always spoke hastily, sometimes even brutally, and it even seemed as if he had a grudge against his wife, for at times he answered her roughly, almost angrily.

One day, when a neighbor's boy came for some eggs, and she spoke rather crossly to him, as she was very busy, her husband suddenly came in and said to her in his harsh voice: "If that were your own child you would not treat him so." She was hurt and did not reply, and then she went back into the house, with all her grief awakened afresh; and at dinner the farmer neither spoke to her nor looked at her, and he seemed to hate her, to despise her, to know something about the affair at last. In consequence she lost her composure, and did not venture to remain alone with him after the meal was over, but left the room and hastened to the church.

It was growing dusk; the narrow nave was in total darkness, but she heard footsteps in the choir, for the sacristan was preparing the tabernacle lamp for the night. That spot of trembling light, which was lost in the darkness of the arches, looked to Rose like her last hope, and with her eyes fixed on it, she fell on her knees. The chain rattled as the

little lamp swung up into the air, and almost immediately the small bell rang out the Angelus through the increasing mist. She went up to the sacristan, as he was going out.

"Is Monsieur le Curé at home?" she asked. "Of course he is; this is his dinner-time." She trembled as she rang the bell of the parsonage. The priest was just sitting down to dinner, and he made her sit down also. "Yes, yes, I know all about it; your husband has mentioned to me the matter that brings you here." The poor woman nearly fainted, and the priest continued: "What do you want, my child?" And he hastily swallowed several spoonfuls of soup, some of which dropped on his greasy cassock. But Rose did not venture to say anything more, and she rose to go, but the priest said: "Courage!"

She went out and returned to the farm without knowing what she was doing. The farmer was waiting for her, as the laborers had gone away during her absence, and she fell heavily at his feet, and, shedding a flood of tears, she said to him: "What have you against me?"

He began to shout and swear: "What have I against you? That I have no children, by Jove! When a man takes a wife it is not that they may live alone together to the end of their days. That is what I have against you. When a cow has no calves she is not worth anything, and when a woman has no children she, too, is worth nothing."

Rose began to weep, and said: "It is not my fault! It is not my fault!" He grew rather more gentle when he heard that, and added: "I do not say that it is, but it is very provoking, all the same."

From that day forward she had only one thought; to have another child; she confided her wish to everybody, and, in consequence of this, a neighbor told her of an infallible method. This was to make her husband take a glass of water with a pinch of ashes in it every evening. The farmer consented to try it, but without success; so they said to each other: "Perhaps there are some secret ways?" And they tried to find out. They were told of a shepherd who lived ten leagues off, and so Vallin one day drove off to consult him. The shepherd gave him a loaf on which he had made some marks; it was kneaded up with herbs, and each of them was to eat a piece of it, but they ate the whole loaf without obtaining any results.

Next, a schoolmaster unveiled mysteries and processes of love which were unknown in the country, but infallible, so he declared; but none of them had the desired effect. Then the priest advised them to make a pilgrimage to the shrine at Fécamp. Rose went with the crowd and prostrated herself in the abbey, and, mingling her prayers with the coarse desires of the peasants around her, she prayed that she might be fruitful a second time; but it was in vain, and then she thought that she was being punished for her first fault, and she was

seized by terrible grief. She was wasting away with sorrow; her husband was also aging prematurely, and was wearing himself out in useless hopes.

Open war broke out between them; he called her names and beat her. They quarreled all day long, and when they were in their room together at night he flung insults and obscenities at her, choking with rage, until one night, not being able to think of any means of making her suffer more, he ordered her to get up and go and stand out of doors in the rain until daylight. As she did not obey, he seized her by the neck and began to strike her in the face with his fists, but she said nothing and did not move. In his exasperation he knelt on her body, and with clenched teeth, and mad with rage, he began to beat her. Then in her despair she rebelled, and flinging him against the wall with a furious gesture, she sat up, and in an altered voice she hissed: "I have had a child, I have had one! I had it by Jacques; you know Jacques. He promised to marry me, but he left this neighborhood without keeping his word."

The man was thunderstruck and could hardly speak, but at last he stammered out: "What are you saying? What are you saying?" Then she began to sob, and amid her tears she continued: "That was the reason why I did not want to marry you. I could not tell you, for you would have left me without any bread for my child. You have

never had any children, so you cannot understand, you cannot understand!"

He said again, mechanically, with increasing surprise: "You have a child? You have a child?"

"You took me by force, as I suppose you know. I did not want to marry you," she said, still sobbing.

Then he rose, lighted the candle, and began to walk up and down, with his arms behind him. She was cowering on the bed and crying, and suddenly he stopped in front of her, and said: "Then it is my fault that you have no children?" She gave him no answer, and he began to walk up and down again, and then, stopping again, he continued: "How old is your child?" "Just six," she whispered. "Why did you not tell me about it?" he asked. "How could I?" she replied, with a sigh.

He remained standing, motionless. "Come, get up," he said. She got up with some difficulty, and then, when she was standing on the floor, he suddenly began to laugh with the hearty laugh of his good days, and, seeing how surprised she was, he added: "Very well, we will go and fetch the child, as you and I can have none together."

She was so frightened that if she had had the strength she would assuredly have run away, but the farmer rubbed his hands and said: "I wanted to adopt one, and now we have found one. I asked the *curé* about an orphan some time ago."

Then, still laughing, he kissed his weeping and

agitated wife on both cheeks, and shouted, as if she could not hear him: "Come along, mother, we will go and see whether there is any soup left; I should not mind a plateful."

She put on her petticoat and they went downstairs; and while she was kneeling in front of the fireplace and lighting the fire under the saucepan, he continued to walk up and down the kitchen with long strides, repeating:

"Well, I am really glad of this; I am not saying it for form's sake, but I am glad, I am really very glad."